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THE LAST JEDI

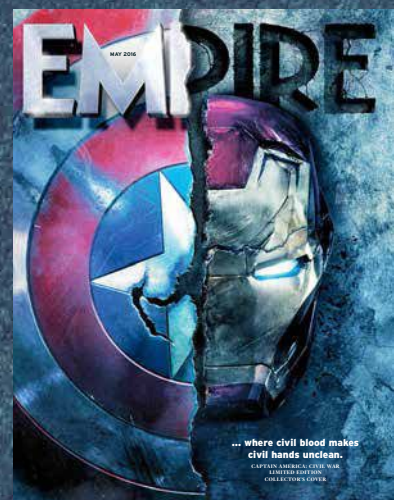
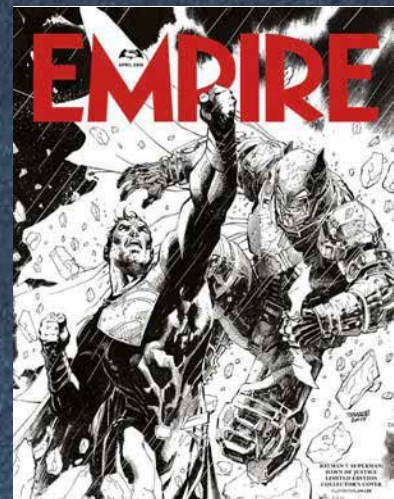
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NICHE 5 0 5

Presented by
Giles Hardie
film critic for
the ABC





THIS MONTH AT EMPIRE

WHAT A TIME to be a *Star Wars* fan, eh? As a man who may or may not have a substantial amount of *Star Wars* memorabilia in storage (after an ex suggested I might wanna, y'know, remove the AT-AT from my lounge area and the Millennium Falcon from my bedroom*), I'm about as invested as one man can be in the future of that galaxy far, far away.

There has been, it must be said, a disturbance in the Force of late: first directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller were ousted from the Untitled Han Solo Movie mid-shoot in favour of Ron Howard, and now director Colin Trevorrow has been shuffled into the ol' escape pod due to differing "visions" with Lucasfilm in regards to *Episode IX*. His replacement J.J. Abrams has already delivered the solid (if maybe a little too *A New Hope*-ish) *The Force Awakens*, thus largely easing the fears of the faithful.

For my space-money however (and there's not a lot of it — I suck at Sabacc), the most promising light in the *Star Wars* galaxy is Rian Johnson's imminent *The Last Jedi*. In our exclusive on-set feature on page 38, Johnson talks about his approach of figuring out the "toughest situations" that each character could face, with Mark Hamill also going on the record to say he initially didn't agree with the writer-director's choices for Luke Skywalker — a character the actor has now lived with for 40-plus years. Such statements indicate we're in for a few left turns and unexpected surprises in *The Last Jedi*, which already appears to be the boldest entry in the *Star Wars* saga since 1980's *The Empire Strikes Back*. Luke-ing forward to it? You Fett-cha. (There's your Jedi-level Dad-puns for the day. You're welcome.)

Lest you think 99 per cent of all movies these days are sequels and remakes, elsewhere in the mag we check in with cinematic enfant terrible Darren Aronofsky for his Jennifer Lawrence-starring horror freak-out *mother!* (pg. 64), and dive into some nightmare-friendly real-life horrors on the set of *MINDHUNTER*, David Fincher's new Netflix TV series that turns an eye on the FBI's early work studying serial killers (heads in boxes not included).

Also: a look back at a bromance for the ages between Coreys Feldman and Haim (pg. 58; check out our sweet *The Lost Boys* poster this issue too); *Spider-Man: Homecoming* director Jon Watts sits down with the legendary Peter Bogdanovich to talk about his 1973 masterpiece *Paper Moon* (pg. 70); Kenneth Branagh tells us about breathing new life into an old classic with his new film *Murder On The Orient Express* (pg. 52) and a 30-year-old movie mirrors modern day with Arnold Schwarzenegger's prophetic sci-fi *The Running Man* (not about a bloke who says "I'll be back" before jogging repeatedly in a large circle).

'Til next we cross lightsabers while making that "vaawoom, vaawoom" sound,

JAMES JENNINGS
EDITOR

(*My bountiful *Star Wars* merch didn't contribute to the end of the relationship. I think.)

**CLASSIC
LINES
OF THE
MONTH**

"I don't want
whoever did this
killed, but I do want
a digit."
p.48

"A moustache was
once a symbol of
goodness, a symbol
of trust."
p.104

"You'd go to buy
carrots and they
were like a 90-year-
old man's erection."
p.98

EMPIRE

(...and what we'd name a *Star Wars* movie about us)

EDITORIAL

EDITOR **JAMES JENNINGS** 02 8268 4621
Star Wars: Revenge Of The Dad Jokes

ART DIRECTOR **KATIE SMITH**
Star Wars: The Phantom Mummy – Sith Happens

PHOTO EDITOR **KRISTI BARTLETT** 02 8114 9493
Star Wars: Insert Coin

CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Adams, Liz Beardsworth, Elizabeth Best, Simon Braund, David Michael Brown, Jeremy Cassar, John Catania, Simon Crook, Nick De Semlyen, Phil De Semlyen, James Dyer, Danny Eccleston, Angie Errigo, Ian Freer, Alex Godfrey, Luke Goodsell, Jethro Haynes, Chris Hewitt, David Hughes, Dan Jolin, Luke Lucas, Danny Mackenzie, Ben McEachen, Jim Mitchell, Justin Metz, Anthony Morris, Ian Nathan, Kim Newman, John Nugent, Helen O'Hara, David Parkinson, Patrick Peters, Nev Pierce, Jonathan Pile, Kate, Poole, Olly Richards, Anna Smith, Damon Wise

ADVERTISING

Brand Manager **Kate Macmillan** 02 9282 8643
South Australian Advertising **Ben Wiles** 08 8267 5032
Queensland Advertising **Judy Taylor** 07 3101 6636
West Australian Advertising **Nicky Simpson** 08 6160 8964
Director of Sales **Fiorella Di Santo**
Sales Director, NSW & QLD **Jo Clasby**
Sales Director, VIC, SA & WA **Jaclyn Clements**

MARKETING AND CIRCULATION

Brand Manager **Georgia Mavrakakis** 02 9288 9650
Subscriptions Marketing Coordinator **Thea Mahony** 02 9282 8583
Circulation Executive **Samantha Nelson** 02 8116 9336

PRODUCTION

Production Controller **Chris Clear** 02 9338 6175
Production Co-Ordinator **Dominic Roy** 02 9282 8691

EMPIRE UK

Editor-In-Chief **Terri White**
Associate Editor **Liz Beardsworth**
International Director **Simon Greves**

BAUER MEDIA

Publisher **Ewen Page**

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THOR: THE MUSICAL

I really wish that when he's done on *Thor: Ragnarok*, Taika Waititi just gets that cast back and makes an all-out musical — with dancers and rock guitar and it's the biggest flop of all time and people will still love it in 30 years. We know that's not going to happen, but we know that's the energy he's bringing to this movie and I can't wait for the fun to start.

MITCHELL HALL, ASQUITH NSW

Mitchell, that sounds like a particularly awesome idea (except the "biggest flop of all time" bit — we need this bad boy to make all the dollars so there are more insane Thor musicals for many years to come).

ALIEN LOVE

Loved your recent piece on famous directors giving their list of favourite films (*Empire* #196, July). I took it a step further and marked down all the most mentioned films, collated it into a list of 20 movies. Sharing the number one spot, with six mentions each, are *Alien* and *Dr. Strangelove*. Will the directors be happy? And yes, I spent two hours reading, re-reading, writing, re-writing and re-re-reading these lists. Don't judge me.

CHRISTOPHER SPENCER, VIA EMAIL

Digging your commitment, Christopher. Whaddya reckon, readers? Worthy winners? Sound off!

BRAVEHEART: M.I.A.

Just finished reading the July issue (yes, I'm a bit behind) which included the anticipated 'Top 100 Greatest Movies' — and what an excellent supplement from top filmmakers listing their personal favourites. However, unless I missed it, I was very surprised that in neither the Top 100 OR the director's lists, *Braveheart* was nowhere to be found. With masterful direction from Max Rockatansky, outstanding performances from the leads to the bit players, beautiful design and cinematography, a powerful script from Randall Wallace and one of the great cinematic soundtracks (by the late James Horner), it's a classic. To paraphrase: Most movies die, *Empire*. Not every movie really lives!

DAVID LUDLOW, VIA EMAIL

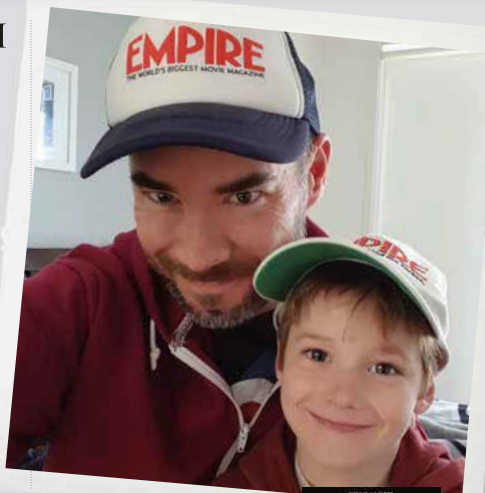
Uh-oh. We may have made Mel mad.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

DEAR TEAM, my wife had a go at me for wearing my old discoloured white *Empire* cap a little too often. So I swapped to my newer one and made this my Facebook profile pic to spite her! Lucky she thinks at least one of us is cute in your merch. Meanwhile this little movie-buff-in-the-making loves *Star Wars* and *The Wizard Of Oz*. I got also got inspired to have a bit of fun with some of our favourite films...

NEV AND HENRY, VIA EMAIL

Nice work, Nev and Henry! If your Facebook profile pic ticked your wife off, this will REALLY get her goat (sorry?). Got any cool photos, readers? Send 'em on in!



Printed letter writers score a DVD copy of *Madiba*, a miniseries about the true lifelong struggle of Nelson Mandela to overthrow apartheid.



WHERE'D GOLDBLUM GO?!

I was so excited that this month's (*Empire* #198) cover story was *Thor: Ragnarok*, with me being a diehard Marvel fan. As I was admiring every word written in that piece as well as the photos, I noticed something funny on page 39... where is Jeff Goldblum's Grandmaster?! I know we all have a thing for Idris Elba, but stripping off Jeff's photo opportunity and replacing it with the Asgardian Heimdall twice (page 40), well... I want my Jeff! Please don't punish the employees for this error, I am sure they meant well (or have a crush on Idris?).

LIP, MELBOURNE, VIC

First of all, who doesn't have a crush on Idris Elba? Second of all, yes, as many of you guys pointed out, we screwed the pooch on this one — unfortunately there's was a glitch in the Matrix which meant the original photo vanished. To make it up to y'all, we present the missing photo to you, bigger than ever (see right). We hope all is forgiven. Enjoy the Goldbluminess of it all!

EMPIRE: NOT KILLING IT?

Yeah that's it *Empire*, I've had enough. You gave the bitterly disappointing *Baby Driver* five stars (what the?) and a few editions ago you featured the nonsensical *Don't Breathe* as the best horror of last year, but the icing on the cake is to give the first decent horror in years — *Killing Ground* — two stars. You say it's "grim sadism" and it's hard to believe this can be "anything approaching entertainment". You clearly don't understand horror and yet still feel the need to review it (whilst obviously missing the point spectacularly). Not only that but you heap praise on the dreadfully overblown and quite stupid *Baby Driver*. Goodbye subscription...

SUSANNA FINN, WERRIBEE, VIC

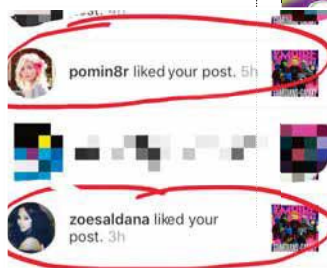
*Sorry to see you go, Susanna. Everyone's entitled to their own opinion — it's what makes the world a wonderful place, innit? — and we still stand by ours. And while an argument can be made that *Killing Ground* is a thriller and not a horror, that's just splitting hairs. And now you're splitting. So much splitting right now. Perhaps we could undergo some couples therapy together?*

ACTUAL GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY LOVE EMPIRE GUARDIANS!

When a 15-year-old's LEGO recreation of a magazine cover done using a desk lamp, iPhone camera and free photo editing apps gets liked by Gamora and Mantis.

LACHLAN TANG, VIA EMAIL

Lachlan! That is too damn cool, friend. This practically makes you best friends with Zoe Saldana and Pom Klementieff now. You know that, right?! (Say hi from us). Readers, we love this kinda stuff. Send in your photos, videos, whatever! (But keep the nudes). We wanna see art, cosplay, whatever ya got...get sending!



SPINE QUOTE
HONOUR ROLE

SPINE QUOTE #198

"Great, you wasted all my clearasil on another picture of Thor."

THE CONNECTION

"From *A Night On The Town* (aka *Adventures In Babysitting*). Thor being on the cover, of course."

THE WINNER

Luke Timmins, you've scored yourself a hat!

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PREVIEW

PULSE-QUICKENING MOVIE AND TV NEWS

EDITED BY PHIL DE SEMLYEN



FIRST LOOK
EXCLUSIVETOMB
RAIDER

OUT 15 MARCH 2018

TALE FROM
THE CRYPTAlicia Vikander tackles
a Lara Croft origins story

WORDS JONATHAN PILE

IT WASN'T THE script or even the director that drew Alicia Vikander to her latest film — it was a video game. “I was intrigued,” she remembers of the moment she first saw 2013’s retooled *Tomb Raider*. “It looked very different from the [*Tomb Raider*] games I played growing up. I wanted to find out what it was.”

For the first time on screen, we’ll meet Lara Croft *before* she gets into the whole crypt exploration business. The new film is based on that 2013 game, but when we meet Lara she’s a cycle courier in London. And it’s not some priceless lost artefact that sets her off on her journey, but a quest to find her missing father. Then she’s marooned on a mystical, largely hostile island, where she must learn to defend herself — or end up in a tomb of her own.

“I knew it would be tough,” admits Vikander of the role. However, it wasn’t the gruelling physical requirements that spooked her, but her on-screen predecessor. “Angelina [Jolie] made Lara Croft into such an icon, and everyone thinks of her. Even *I* saw her face when I thought about the character.”

But memories of previous Laras — from Jolie to the game’s Rhona Mitra — should be banished. More character-led, this *Tomb Raider* promises to be a very different beast. “We asked, ‘What are the famous traits of this person?’” recalls Vikander. “‘How can we demonstrate them in the story, but make her feel like a young woman in 2018?’” Albeit a modern young woman who plunders magical artefacts for a living.



ON-SET
EXCLUSIVETHE
PUNISHEROUT SPRING
NETFLIXCASTLE
ROCKSThere's no escape for the guilty as
The Punisher comes to Netflix

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

A DARK SOUNDSTAGE, on the kind of Brooklyn winter's day that makes the rats in the walls think twice before peeking out, and *Empire* has come to watch the Punisher — the most feared killing machine in comic books — do some actual, honest-to-goodness punishing.

He's the kind of man whose body counts are so high you can only keep track with a body accountant. But currently, he's sitting on the floor of a warehouse, nursing a beer, remembering how he met his wife while playing guitar under a tree in Central Park. "Changed my life," smiles Jon Bernthal's Frank Castle, and takes a sip. The only things being punished here are the heartstrings.

Do not adjust your Netflix connection. *The Punisher*, the show that sees Bernthal's vigilante strut his solo stuff after making a bloody splash in *Daredevil* Season 2, hasn't gone soft. Bernthal, who prepped to play Castle by going on long walks through Manhattan in the small hours with a backpack and a don't-fuck-with-me glare, won't suddenly be busking, like a psycho Ed Sheeran.

We're witnessing a key scene in a mid-season episode, where Castle and his tech guy, Micro (*Girls*' Ebon Moss-Bachrach), stop planning to kill the bad guys and focus on matters of the heart. Specifically, how they met their wives. "Part of this season for Frank is [about how] he's built this wall around his heart," says Bernthal. "He's starting to care about things, and people."

But this 13-episode series, the first non-*Defenders* venture for Netflix and Marvel, is all about Castle, a bottomless pit of fury after his wife and kids were killed, deciding to do a lot of you-know-what. "It's the only thing that silences the demons, temporarily," says Bernthal of Castle. "There's going to be an attempt to move beyond the Punisher, but that's something he can't shake. There's part of me that's hungry to get back into the darkness, that's excited to see it fall apart. And I'll go back to my long walks." That body accountant better get a new calculator.

Clockwise from above:

Jon Bernthal prepares to take vengeance as the Punisher, Frank Castle; In sniper mode on location; With tech assistant Micro (Ebon Moss-Bachrach); Suited up, and ready to employ that bottomless pit of fury.



THE DEBATE

IS DANIEL CRAIG RIGHT TO COME BACK AS JAMES BOND?

The actor is officially returning for Bond 25, but should we be glad he's taking that licence to kill for one last spin?

ILLUSTRATIONS DAVID MAHONEY



YES
CHRIS HEWITT

SO, THE WORST-kept secret in movies is out. Daniel Craig is back as Bond for a fifth and, it seems, final time with Bond 25 (a name I'd be delighted if they kept, if only to imagine Adele singing, "Bond Twenty-Fiiiiiiiiive!" at the Oscars).

From production company Eon's point of view, keeping Craig on the team makes sense. As with *Skyfall* and the 50th anniversary, the 25th Bond will be kind of a big deal, and breaking in a new 007 might be more hassle than it's worth.

There could be any number of reasons behind Craig's decision to stick around. It might be the notion of becoming the longest-serving Bond when the film is released in 2019, pipping Sir Roger Moore by days. And he doubtless received an offer with lots of zeroes (and, I hope, a 007

after the decimal point). But the reason he's given is the same reason I'm happy — excited, even — to see him return. "I want to go out on a high note," he said, an acknowledgement that *Spectre* wasn't the victory march he'd hoped for. It starts strongly, but the second Christoph Waltz shows up, it monologues itself into a coma.

And that's just it. No Bond actor has received the glorious ride into the sunset they deserve. Sean Connery's last film was *Diamonds Are Forever*, a performance so phoned-in Cubby Broccoli should have refused to accept the charges. Many love *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, but it's George Lazenby's only Bond film. Roger Moore went out creaking with *A View To A Kill*. Pierce Brosnan finished with *Die Another Day*, the worst of all Bonds. Only Timothy Dalton passes the quality test with the underrated *Licence To Kill*, and he didn't receive a send-off as nobody knew it would be his last.

So Craig deserves one last chance to ensure future conversations about the best Bond don't become, "Daniel Craig was good, but..." His hit rate as Bond is 50 per cent, with two crackers and two stinkers. Bond 25 could make it 60 per cent,

commendable for any franchise, and a high note worthy of Adele. But to do so, Craig — like Dalton, an Actor first, Movie Star second, who has highfalutin ideas about turning Bond into an actual character — needs to forget all that, and have fun. Good, old-fashioned, keeping-the-British-end-up fun. If his Bond goes out with a smile, there's a chance the rest of us will follow.



NO
JONATHAN PILE

THE MOST BAFFLING element of Daniel Craig's announcement on Stephen Colbert's *The Late Show* — that he will be returning as Bond — wasn't that it had taken





Daniel Craig
raised the roof
in *Skyfall*.



so long coming, or why he'd changed his mind after he'd previously said he'd rather slash his wrists than play 007 again — it was the whoops and cheers from the studio audience. Is this *really* good news?

It's understandable that Craig would want to return (and it's not for the vast sums of money). He said it himself: he'd like to "go out on a high". With the benefit of distance, it's easier to see *Spectre* for what it was — the weakest film of the Craig era, a bit like *Quantum Of Solace*, only an hour longer. And despite the finale seeming like it was written with a view to killing off that iteration of the character, you can understand why he suddenly wants another crack at it.

But when Craig took on the role, part of the appeal was his youth. We hadn't had a Bond under 40 years old since George Lazenby, and his physicality enabled him to take the character where no previous Bond could go. Watch the opening of *Casino Royale* again and imagine even Sean Connery pulling it off. But Craig will be 51 by the time the movie comes out, assuming a 2019 release. In the Eon films, only Roger

Moore was older when he played Bond. Craig will surely do his training regime and look mighty fine should he be required to smoulder in a pair of blue trunks, but 13 years on, that same raw athleticism won't be there. And those crane chases can be hellish on the knees.

Much of *Casino Royale*'s success came from how fresh and exciting it was, a Bond rebirth. Craig has been a fine 007 but it can't last forever, and with *Spectre* it felt like his time had come to a natural end. Except, now it hasn't. Compare it with *Doctor Who*, another long-running series that regularly recasts its main character. Peter Capaldi is a popular Doctor — dark but comedic, with an unpredictable streak — but he decided not to outstay his welcome. Just look at the excitement generated by the news that Jodie Whittaker would be taking over the part.

That could be Bond right now. We could be debating what a new actor would bring to the role, and in what direction their casting suggested the franchise was being taken. Instead, that will have to wait. Daniel Craig will return in Bond 25. A safe bet, but hardly a thrilling one. It really was time to say, "Never again."



SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

How director Dee Rees braved mud and mozzies to bring Mississippi's grim past to life

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

THINGS WENT SOUTH in every sense on Dee Rees' new Mississippi-set drama, *Mudbound*. "It was *absolutely* muddy," laughs the director of a shoot in the sweltering boondocks outside New Orleans. "Between the waders, the mosquitos and the heat, we were always uncomfortable. One of the producers sent me a picture from the set where I'm in ripped jeans and a bandana, and I wondered how we survived it."

The film's title, of course, isn't just a description of the on-set conditions. Named after the Hillary Jordan novel on which it's based, the "mudbound" metaphor refers to a bleak era in post-World War II Southern life. Two families — one black and one white — find themselves mired in racial inequality, eking out lives, and love affairs, in an unforgiving landscape. The landowning McAllans (Carey Mulligan, Garrett Hedlund and Jason Clarke) and the sharecropping Jackson clan (Jason Mitchell, Rob Morgan and Mary J Blige) form the heart of Rees' third feature (her first, *Pariah*, earned raves in 2011). It is, she says, a "big story" that parallels conflicts at home with Nazi-battling abroad. "You think it's a love story, then



a war story or a [story] about Jim Crow," says Rees, "but it's about all those things."

Nonetheless, the spectre of slavery and segregation hangs over the story like the humid Southern fug. The dialogue is peppered with racist epithets, and simmering tensions explode into a fierce Ku Klux Klan lynching scene that took two days to film and tested its director's skills in unusual ways. "The white actors needed to feel safe saying these lines," she notes. "I said to my head Klan guy, 'You're going to say horrible things and I want you to lean into it.'"

Mudbound's Mississippi scenes were shot in Louisiana (the war scenes were shot in Budapest and on a Long Island soundstage) because

authentic locations were easier to come by there — right down to the original, if now leaky sharecropper cabins. "Every slave movie now gets shot in New Orleans, because they kept all that stuff," Rees explains. "Mississippi didn't preserve its history in that way."

The pay-off for this mix of storytelling ambition and painstaking authenticity came when Netflix paid \$12.5 million for *Mudbound* at Sundance in January. It is, as Rees remembers, a breakout success several hundred mosquito bites in the making. "If there was any Zika virus on location," she laughs, "I have it."

MUDBOUND IS ON NETFLIX FROM 17 NOVEMBER

Above: Jamie (Garrett Hedlund) and Ronsel (Jason Mitchell) forge an uneasy friendship. **Left:** Landowners Henry McAllan (Jason Clarke) and Laura McAllan (Carey Mulligan).

Top to bottom: Out of the frying pan... Harold Meyerowitz (Dustin Hoffman) dishes up for son Danny (Adam Sandler); Brothers Danny and Matthew (Ben Stiller); Director-writer Noah Baumbach caps off another day with Hoffman.

THE SEVEN YEAR SWITCH

After a long break, comic actor Adam Sandler gets serious again in *The Meyerowitz Stories*

WORDS ALEX GODFREY

IT HAPPENS, ROUGHLY, every seven years. Amid relentless runs of the usual goofy fare, Adam Sandler gets plucked away to work his *cojones* on something more serious. First came Paul Thomas Anderson's *Punch-Drunk Love* (2002), then Judd Apatow's *Funny People* (2009), and now, Noah Baumbach's *The Meyerowitz Stories*, and it's possibly the actor's most affecting performance yet.

While the action swirls around bitter old patriarch Harold (Dustin Hoffman), it is essentially the story of his two put-upon sons — the unemployed Danny (Adam Sandler) and his hotshot half-brother Matthew (Ben Stiller). Buzz has been building for the film ever since it got an enthusiastic standing ovation at Cannes this year.

Sandler is terrific throughout, gracefully holding his tongue at some points, gloriously losing his rag at others. "I've always liked him," explains Baumbach. "I loved him on *Saturday Night Live*, I loved his stand-up." The pair had

met once, 10 years earlier, to discuss collaborating. "I always felt one day I'd have something for him. He has such vulnerability and sweetness. This is my third movie with Ben, and when I had this idea for brothers, it felt like an interesting combination. They're friends, and other than that bit in *Happy Gilmore*, they'd never worked together in a bigger way. This was a way to do it."

Sandler, though, had major worries. Baumbach had told him he needed his cast to stick to every word, every punctuation point, so he learnt his entire role before shooting, scared, he told Stiller, of messing up. Had he expressed his worries to Baumbach? "When you work closely together on a movie," says Baumbach, "for everybody, fears come up — 'I don't wanna fuck this up' kind of feelings. I'm sure he's telling the truth when he said he was scared. But also, he was so open and excited, and there was a tremendous amount of confidence and bravery in what he did. Or it wouldn't be as great as it was."

Sandler and Stiller make a formidable double act: Baumbach gives both the opportunity to mine so-far untapped emotional depths, while the physical comedy is just as strong. The scene where they attempt to destroy someone's car, ineptly and incapably, is Laurel-and- Hardy levels of stupid. "They're great comedians and



I wanted to see them run about and smash something up," says Baumbach. "It would have been a missed opportunity to have them together and not take advantage of that." It's amazing that nobody paired them sooner. More, please.

THE MEYEROWITZ STORIES IS ON NETFLIX FROM 13 OCTOBER

ALAMY



ON-SET
EXCLUSIVEGOODBYE
CHRISTOPHER
ROBIN

OUT 23 NOVEMBER

THE
COLOUR
OF HONEYDomhnall Gleeson's take on
Winnie the Pooh's creator is
not child's play

WORDS IAN FREER

23 SEPTEMBER 2016 is a landmark day on *Goodbye Christopher Robin*, a tightly focused biopic of *Winnie the Pooh* creator A.A. Milne. *Empire* is in the Ashdown Forest in East Sussex on the actual bridge where Poohsticks, the game played by Pooh and friends, was invented (a stone noting the fact has been discreetly covered up). Tourists from Canada, Scotland and Japan wait to pass as Domhnall Gleeson as A(lan) A(lexander) Milne and nine-year-old Will Tilston as his son Christopher Robin drop sticks, then leg it to the other side of the bridge to see whose emerges first. A props man stands in the water to recycle sticks.

"This is the point in the film where Alan and Christopher Robin are getting to know one another," says Gleeson, retaining a pitch-perfect upper-class English accent. "Alan has been on a tough journey and, all of a sudden, the innocence of the boy and childhood is just rubbing off on him. It's giving him a new lease of life."

This "tough journey" is *Goodbye Christopher Robin*'s dramatic hook. As written by Frank Cottrell-Boyce, the creation of Pooh, Piglet and co is informed by Milne's struggles with post-World War I demons, his relationship with wife Daphne (Margot Robbie) and the tensions caused when Christopher Robin becomes the prototype child celebrity. "It's not a sickly sweet film," says director Simon Curtis. "There's pain and distress as well."

Despite being near universally popular, Gleeson didn't grow up on Pooh (so to speak), which he thinks is an advantage. "Having a bit of a cold eye is good because you warm up to the man every day," he says. "We shouldn't have to know about *Winnie the Pooh* for it to necessarily mean something. For me it's about a father and a son, and a man struggling with PTSD."

With that, the actor returns to his sticks. And for a glorious moment, the line between innocent childhood and tormented adulthood is blurred.

Clockwise from above:

Will Tilston as Christopher Robin, clutching the soon-to-be legendary bear; Kelly Macdonald plays nanny Olive; Director Simon Curtis (right) joins Tilston and Domhnall Gleeson (as A.A. Milne) on the Poohsticks bridge in the Ashdown Forest; Margot Robbie completes the family as Milne's wife, Daphne.

THE INTRO

Empire showcases tomorrow's stars today

ALI FAZAL

WORDS **DAN JOLIN** PORTRAIT **VIBHOR YADAV**

AGE __ 30

PLAYS __ Abdul Karim in Stephen Frears' based-on-fact period drama *Victoria & Abdul*. Karim was an Indian clerk who befriended Queen Victoria (Judi Dench – again) and controversially became her teacher, or 'Munshi'. "It was his confidence and innocence that really attracted me," says Fazal.

BACKSTORY __ "I broke my arm during a basketball match at boarding school and thought my life was over. Then a friend said, 'Your English isn't bad. They're putting on *The Tempest* and there's a cute girl playing Miranda. Why don't you try out?' That was the beginning of this disease."

EARLY ROLES __ "I started in Bollywood with a cameo in a movie called *3 Idiots* [2009], which was a hit. I did have a stint on *Fast & Furious* [as Safar in *Furious 7*], but it was a come-and-go thing."

THE BIG BREAK __ "It was brave of them to come to India to [cast] someone. But it was a long, traumatising process. I mean, I love him to death now – he's my guru – but during my audition Stephen Frears had the Delhi belly. He was sprawled across this couch barely looking at me [laughs]. But I got the part a few weeks later."

HOBBIES __ "I still love playing basketball, but I also like to keep up with current affairs and political stuff – considering what's happening in the world today and especially in my country."

ACTING HEROES __ "I grew up with Brando. He's someone I almost think I might have hallucinated."

NEXT UP __ "There's something I might be doing with Amazon, but I'm not allowed to say much on that, and I have two films lined up in India. As for *Fast & Furious*, you never know. I might return..."

VICTORIA & ABDUL IS IN CINEMAS NOW



Ali Fazal, photographed exclusively for *Empire* at the Ministry Of New in Mumbai, India, on 3 July 2017.



STYLING: WHO WORE WHAT WHEN. GROOMING: CHETAN KARKHANIS. Turtle neck, yellow jacket, dark trousers and pocket square: Canada Clothing Co.

PREVIEW



Above: Stephen Mangan, Andrew Garfield and Claire Foy. **Below:** Robin (Garfield) with wife Diana (Foy). **Bottom:** And before polio set his life on a different course.

WAITING TO EXHALE

How true-life tearjerker *Breathe* beat *Jungle Book* to become Andy Serkis' directorial debut

WORDS DAN JOLIN

FOR A MAN whose acting career has been somewhat unconventional, it should come as no surprise that Andy Serkis hasn't taken an orthodox route into directing. Usually, actors-turned-directors start out with an intimate drama. But when Serkis first called "Action!" in 2015, it was on a big-budget, VFX-driven adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. Except that was put on hiatus by Warner Bros. when Disney's *The Jungle Book* beat it to release. So Serkis' second production, shot over seven swift weeks last year, is now his actual directorial debut and it's, well, a small, manageably intimate drama. Although not quite that straightforward.

Breathe relates the story of Robin Cavendish (Andrew Garfield) — the father of Serkis' producing partner Jonathan Cavendish — who, in 1958, was struck by polio and paralysed from the neck down. With the help of his wife Diana (Claire Foy), he resolved to continue living as freely as possible. "The script's love story element made me cry," says Serkis, "but what most interested me was the notion of pioneering [solutions for living with] disability in the 1950s to the '70s. To be living two minutes from death and then take yourself out of hospital so you can live life to the full seems like putting yourself on the moon."



With Robin's friends rallying round to help cobble together respirator chairs and refit cars, the story reminded Serkis of Philippe Petit in *Man On Wire*. "Robin had this Heath Robinsonian approach to life where you're making it up as you're going along," he says. The result is a movie that is less *The Theory Of Everything* than, as Serkis puts it with a laugh, "*The Diving Bell And The Butterfly* meets *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*." What it isn't is a mawkish disabled story. "It's kind of a heist movie," he explains. "It's about being maverick, which is what really appealed to me about it." *Jungle Book* may have to wait but, for Serkis, the adventure goes on.

BREATHE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 26 DECEMBER



ON-SET
EXCLUSIVETHE
SNOWMAN

OUT 19 OCTOBER

SLAY
FROSTY

With *The Snowman*, director Tomas Alfredson seeks to launch a stylish new crime franchise

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

MICHAEL FASSBENDER IS singing a few bars of *Walking In The Air* on *The Snowman*'s Oslo set. This croaky nostalgia has been sparked by *Empire*'s mention of Raymond Briggs' '80s animation which shares a name, but absolutely nothing else, with his new thriller. There'll be snowmen, but they'll be left by a serial killer at murder scenes. Fassbender's cop, Harry Hole, must solve the case before the leads, well, melt.

Originally a Martin Scorsese project set in Detroit and Chicago, *The Snowman* was entrusted to *Let The Right One In*'s Tomas Alfredson after Scorsese passed in 2013. Bringing Hole, author Jo Nesbø's pin-sharp but troubled detective, back to Norway has opened plenty of doors to the production. It's February and the shoot has moved from the ice-capped cliffs of Telemark to Oslo's waterfront. Tonight they're at the imposing red-brick City Hall, one of those open doors. "We're not *The Revenant* yet," jokes producer Robyn Slovo, as black Mercedes sweep through the slush and discharge VIPs for a bash hosted by J.K. Simmons' media mogul, Arve Støp.

It's in this Gotham-y world that Fassbender's rumpled 'tec teams with talented young cop Katrine Bratt (Rebecca Ferguson). The political pressure to find the killer is high; Hole is vulnerable, destructible even. "These characters often seem almost bulletproof," Fassbender notes, "but he comes out bottom in a lot of tussles. He's got a lot of flaws. He's enigmatic."

The director and his star almost worked together on *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, and they've hit it off second time around. "I watch him as closely as I can; he's an original, an artist," says Fassbender of Alfredson. On set, cast and crew queue up to extol their director's eye for snappy visuals. "There's nothing mundane about anything Tomas does," says Slovo. "He thinks visually."

Nesbø's 11 Harry Hole books have sold 30 million copies worldwide, a fanbase the filmmakers hope will fuel an entire franchise. As snowmen go, that's a pretty big carrot.

Clockwise from above: Michael Fassbender as Jo Nesbø's 30 million-selling detective Harry Hole; With police partner Katrine Bratt (Rebecca Ferguson); Bracing the Norwegian elements; Bratt faces flashy media mogul Arve Støp (J.K. Simmons).

FIFTIES SHADED DARKER

Here: The American Dream is a living nightmare for Margaret (Julianne Moore) and Gardner (Matt Damon). Below: Gardner makes an absurd getaway.

Something is rotten in the state of *Suburbicon*. Writer-director George Clooney reveals all

WORDS IAN FREER

IT'S THREE YEARS since George Clooney last sat in a director's chair. Following 2014's *The Monuments Men*, his new project stems partly from his own obsessions and partly from an old Joel and Ethan Coen script called *Suburbicon*.

"I'd been writing a script about [1957 documentary] *Crisis In Levittown*. I wanted to talk about building walls and scapegoating minorities," he says. "Themes that sadly never lose their relevance. At the same time, I pulled out a 1999 version of *Suburbicon* and thought the two stories were perfect to put together."

In splicing the two scripts with creative partner Grant Heslov — "I write long hand. Grant does the typing, thank God" — Clooney's tale peers into the idyllic American communities of 1959. If the dark side beyond white picket fences sounds very David Lynch, Clooney is drawing his inspiration directly from the period. In particular, the work of '50s German filmmaker Douglas Sirk, whose melodramas explored the manicured lawns and apple-pie façade of

suburban life, became a touchstone.

"Specifically we looked at *Written On The Wind*," says Clooney about Sirk's 1956 classic. "We wanted to take the picture of what we think of the 1950s and put it in perspective. It all seemed so much simpler then. Of course, it was only simpler if you were a straight white man. Everyone else had a pretty tough time."

In *Suburbicon* Clooney puts a 'straight white man' through the mill. Matt Damon is Gardner Lodge, a husband and father whose life is turned upside down when he becomes the victim of a home invasion, while Oscar Isaac, in a role initially mooted for Clooney, plays an investigator with his suspicions around Lodge.

"Matt's character is a man who hates his life and does something really stupid to try to fix it," explains Clooney. "Every thing he does leads him deeper into chaos. And Gardner Lodge is not the guy you want around in times of chaos."



Within the darkness, Clooney has indulged himself at least one moment of absurdity: the hilarious sight of Damon as Lodge pedalling away from a raging fire, on possibly the world's smallest bicycle. "I rode around on that bike for hours myself just to make sure it was doable," admits Clooney. "Matt showed us all of his Jason Bourne skills in riding that little bike."

If all goes to plan, 'The Lodge Supremacy' may well be on the cards.

SUBURBICON IS IN CINEMAS FROM 26 OCTOBER

NEW MUTANTS

Lock up your unicorns: Deadpool is back, and he's got some new friends

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

HE'S MAD, BAD and dangerous to know but, like Lord Byron, Deadpool has cool friends. Heavily scarred mutant Cable is appearing in *Deadpool 2*, a second Marvel turn for Josh Brolin to go with Thanos. Cable's timey-wimey backstory will *not* be fully explained here, but essentially he's Jean Grey and Cyclops' son. Nathan 'Cable' Summers was born in an alternate future where mutants are hunted, and he's had one eye and arm replaced with Terminator-looking cybernetics. He's strong, uncanny and deadly serious.

But there's another key, new flavour: Domino, played by Zazie Beetz (*Atlanta*). She's a gifted marksman with the mutant power to twist probability in her favour. In the comics her relationships with Deadpool and Cable haven't always run harmoniously. In one story, a shapeshifter called Copycat (real name: Vanessa. Could Morena Baccarin's character have mutant powers?) posed as Domino and tried to kill Cable. Things then got fractious between the real Domino and Deadpool when he sprung her from captivity and she immediately shot him. Another run saw her help Cable kill a dictator, only for him to try to install himself in the dead politician's place. Let's call it a love-hate relationship.

The chances are *Deadpool 2* will lift no more than elements from those stories, but the contrast between the manic Deadpool, the "grumpy uncle from the future" (as Reynolds puts it) Cable and the mercurial Domino feels exciting. Just as long as they don't let too much backstory get in the way of the epic squabbling.



Top to bottom: Gerard Butler as satellite designer Jake; "What happens if I press this button?"

BROLLIES UP

The lowdown on weather epic *Geostorm*, the year's most drainbusting blockbuster

WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN

IT'S TWISTER WITH a twist. It's *Hard Rain* with harder rain. It's 2012 multiplied by 300. Whether you're ready or not, *Geostorm* is blowing in like a freak cyclone, and it's shaping up to be the most preposterous, over-the-top action movie of the year.

The man originally responsible for this mega-budget mash-up is Dean Devlin, the producer of apocalyptic blockbusters such as *Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow* and, yes, 2012, who was hired by Warner Bros. to make his directing debut with *Geostorm*. Together with writing partner Paul Guyot, he sketched out the story, then threw an all-you-can-sleet buffet of meteorological madness at it, including 14,000 tornados hurtling through Mumbai, a monstrous flash-freeze in Afghanistan and a hailstorm in Tokyo. "There's a lot of spectacle," Devlin promised *Empire* during the shoot back in early 2015. "But I'm going for the cheer factor too. Event [movies] are like a rock concert."

Unexpectedly, though, the plug has since been pulled. Late last year a behind-the-scenes hurricane hit *Geostorm*, with Devlin departing the project and director Danny Cannon (*Judge Dredd*) and producer Jerry Bruckheimer being summoned to oversee extensive reshoots. It didn't bode well, and the early trailers have lurched



tonally from gritty foreboding to cheesy comedy, but one should never underestimate a film that features 3,000 firenados.

According to its star, those tonal shifts are part of its joy. "You have a disaster movie, a space movie, a romantic movie, a political thriller," reels off Gerard Butler, "and it's kind of a comedy as well." Sure enough, the plot zigzags between genres like a Netflix user with ADD. Butler is a satellite designer named Jake, who is rocketed into outer space to investigate rum doings aboard an international space station. Said space station was set up to reverse climate change on Earth, but it's creating natural disasters instead, building up to a bona fide globe-crusher. And if that wasn't enough, Jake's brother Max (Jim Sturgess) is in the White House, uncovering a conspiracy to kill the President. "I play a cheeky chappy in a spacesuit," explains Butler, "and I got to do some of the coolest shit I've ever done." All being well, all that production brouhaha will just end up being a geostorm in a geoteacup.

GEOSTORM IS IN CINEMAS FROM 19 OCTOBER



USS Callister boldly goes where no *Black Mirror* episode has gone before.

MIRROR'S EDGE

Black Mirror creator Charlie Brooker ventures out of this world for Season 4

WORDS JOHN NUGENT

HOW DO YOU one-up a dark-edged sci-fi that's already featured virtual-reality nursing homes, flying robo-bees and Prime Ministerial pig-shagging? That was the challenge facing *Black Mirror* creator Charlie Brooker as he sat down to plot out its fourth season. The answer, it turns out, was by being more ambitious. One new episode, 'USS Callister', sees the show blast into space; another, 'Black Museum', features three stories in one, which Brooker likens to *The Simpsons*' 'Treehouse Of Horror'.

With worldwide recognition and a place in the cultural lexicon secured — Stephen King has praised the show as “like *The Twilight Zone*, only rated R” — *Black Mirror* can afford to splash out. Season 4 will treat fans to a “gruelling thriller”, an “indie drama”, and one “quite playful” episode set in a “wonky society”.

For a self-confessed neurotic like Brooker, it's the latest bold step in an often agonised creative process. He offers an example of the torments involved in piloting *Black Mirror* to the small screen. It was summer 2016, and the show was about to launch on Netflix, but Brooker couldn't

decide in what order the six episodes should air. “You know that scene in *Swingers* where Jon Favreau leaves a hundred messages on someone's answerphone?” he laughs. “It was a bit like that. I'd send emails saying, ‘This is the running order!’ Then five minutes later, I'd send another one saying, ‘Forget it! I'm crazy!’” Part of his worry was over making the show accessible to newcomers.

As Season 4 looms, accessibility is less of a concern. “We can assume people know the nature of the show, broadly speaking,” he says. He's not wrong. A protest sign at a recent anti-Trump rally read, “This Episode Of *Black Mirror* Sucks”. Brooker is reluctant to give away too many specifics, but in describing each episode, the recurring theme is newness: to challenge himself, and the audience, with something surprising. For the ever-surprising *Black Mirror*, it's quite an ask.

It's a huge logistical challenge, too. Each episode is a self-contained mini-movie (“a full meal”, in Brooker's words), with the budget to match. Season 4 was filmed in Canada, Spain and Iceland, with directors including Jodie Foster, John Hillcoat and *Game Of Thrones*' Tim Van Patten. There's the first acknowledgement that some episodes exist in the same universe. Its creator, however, remains his understated self. “In doing [Season 3], I became aware that a few more things are possible,” Brooker acknowledges. Now all he needs to decide is the running order.

BLACK MIRROR SEASON 4 IS ON NETFLIX IN DECEMBER



Above: The Jodie Foster-directed 'Arkangel'.
Here: Andrea Riseborough in John Hillcoat's 'Crocodile'.
Below: Douglas Hodges and Letitia Wright in 'Black Museum'.





The *Saw* franchise's legendary traps are present and correct.

JIGSAW PUZZLER

Saw's killer has been dead for years, so what's he doing headlining his own spin-off?

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

AFTER SEVEN INSTALMENTS and 74 of the most creative deaths in horror movie history, *Saw* finally crawled to its bloody end in 2010. Except now there's *Jigsaw*: a new instalment that renders *Saw: The Final Chapter* a lot less final than it claimed at the time. It's simultaneously a jumping-on point for newcomers and a Part VIII for those already up to, well, snuff.

We might reasonably expect a fresh encounter with John Kramer, the killer (played by Tobin Bell) nicknamed Jigsaw after the puzzle-piece signature he carves from his victims. As ever with this twisty-turny series, though, nothing is that obvious. Cancer claimed Kramer in *Saw III*, only for him to pop up in flashbacks for the subsequent sequels, usually to retcon past events in increasingly noodle-baking ways. Now,



Michael and Peter Spierig on set.

10 years after his demise, murders tallying with his modus operandi have begun again. So he's back, right? Or is he? And if Kramer really is dead, who's setting the fiendish new traps?

That mystery was crucial in luring Peter Spierig and his brother Michael — the Australian twins behind sci-fi *Daybreakers* and *Predestination* — into this well-worn franchise. “We weren’t interested in out-grossing the previous films, and I don’t mean financially,” jokes Peter Spierig. “It was about doing a really exciting thriller.” The promise is for all the traps *Saw* devotees could wish for, but with an added twist of sleuthing. ‘CSI: Torture Chamber’, if you will. “What I love is the detective aspect,” adds Spierig.

The original studio pitch was for “less brutality [and] more thrills”. The entry had to



Halloran (Callum Keith Rennie) and Detective Keith (Clé Bennett).

stand alone, too. As anyone who’s tried to detangle the events of *Saw IV* without close reference to *Saw III* will rue, this franchise isn’t exactly kind to the newcomer. “If you haven’t seen any of the *Saw* films before, you’ll be able to get it all pretty easily,” promises Michael Spierig. “Although if you have seen the others, that’s certainly helpful.”

So will the Bell be tolling again? *Empire* is met with a straight bat on the big question. “What makes you think Tobin is in it at all?” teases Peter Spierig. With or without the mysterious killer, this surprise addition to the *Saw* franchise will take us back to the grunge-noir roots of James Wan’s first instalment. The Spierigs want to play again.

JIGSAW IS IN CINEMAS FROM 2 NOVEMBER



FIRST LOOK
EXCLUSIVEJUMANJI:
WELCOME TO
THE JUNGLE

OUT 26 DECEMBER

NO DICE

Swapping board game for console, the new *Jumanji* has some surprises in store

WORDS OWEN WILLIAMS

BANISH MEMORIES OF Robin Williams cavorting with CG rhinos, because *Jumanji: Welcome To The Jungle* has fresh surprises in store. That mystical board game has become an 8-bit adventure game, its players are transforming, *Tron*-like, into adult avatars of themselves, and there are now movie stars galore. A lot can happen in 22 years.

Underpinning this new treatment is some slyly playful casting. “They’re all stylised character archetypes,” explains director Jake Kasdan of his quartet of unwitting jungle adventurers. Karen Gillan plays an all-action commando, Kevin Hart is a panicky zoologist and Dwayne Johnson — “the action hero of his generation, top of a list of one” according to Kasdan — is, well, a wimp. Oh, and Jack Black’s bombastic professor is the avatar of a vain *female* high-schooler (Madison Iseman). “It could have been a tricky high-wire act,” laughs Kasdan, “but it was clear from the first page at the table read that what Jack was doing was inspired.”

Providing shared DNA with the original is a “mysterious supernatural artefact”. Look out as well for a nod or two to Williams’ man-child, Alan Parrish. “We’ve acknowledged that character,” is the only hint Kasdan will offer. Four new big-name players have entered the game; they’re going to have their hands full with whatever mayhem lies in store.

ON.SCREEN

THE *EMPIRE* GUIDE TO EVERYTHING IN CINEMAS THIS MONTH

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★ OKAY ★★ POOR ★ AWFUL

DETROIT



OUT 9 NOVEMBER
RATED MA15+ / 143 MINS

DIRECTOR Kathryn Bigelow

CAST John Boyega, Algee Smith, Anthony Mackie, Will Poulter, Jason Mitchell, John Krasinski, Jack Reynor, Hannah Murray, Kaitlyn Dever

PLOT Detroit, Michigan, 1967. In the heat of the infamous 12th Street uprising, a task-force, led by racist cop Philip Krauss (Poulter), raids the Algiers Motel searching for a sniper. When they fail to find him, the mostly African-American guests are subjected to a horrifying storm of hatred and violence that spills into murder.

FORTY-THREE DEAD, 1,200 injured, 7,000 arrested, 2,000 buildings scorched. It's easy to get lost in the shattering scale of the Detroit riots. Over five days in 1967, the Summer Of Love exploded into hate as the civil rights movement tipped into civil war. Powered by centuries of white oppression, the African-American uprising left Motor City a burnt-out, smoking husk.

Kathryn Bigelow's eviscerating epic, her first since *Zero Dark Thirty*, warrants a subtitle: 'The Anatomy Of A Riot'. Bigelow is a master of time-bomb cinema and its portentous, tick-tocking rhythms, but *Detroit* detonates from the opening reel. After a clatter of archive news footage, you're plunged into a combustible recreation of a cop raid on a speakeasy — the flashpoint that fuelled the revolt. As looting breaks out and the tanks are rolled in, Bigelow sets her cast on a collision course: Will Poulter's callous cop, introduced shooting a rioter in the back as if he's out hunting

game; Algee Smith's Larry Reed, lead singer in Motown soul group The Dramatics; and John Boyega's private security guard, Melvin Dismukes.

The riot is into its third day when the three converge at the Algiers Motel — a refuge from the violence that, in a hideous twist of irony, became the backdrop to a massacre. Alerted by a gunshot (actually a prank with a starter pistol), the Detroit Police and the National Guard Swiss-cheese the motel with bullets, then move in to raid the building. As the innocent suspects are rounded up, what starts out as an interrogation rapidly descends into a kangaroo court — Krauss (Poulter) as judge and jury, and fellow cop Demens (Reynor) as his compliant accomplice. By the end of the night, three of the guests will be dead, nine will have been assaulted and the cops will saunter out as if nothing ever happened. Recreated in unflinching real-time, *Detroit's* sustained sense-attack will be talked about for



Clockwise from left: Will Poulter's Krauss pins innocent Fred (Jacob Latimore) against the wall; John Boyega's wary security guard Melvin Dismukes; 12th Street rioting; Kaitlyn Dever as Karen, realising the refuge at the Algiers Motel is anything but.

years, if not decades, to come — an hour-long endurance so physical you experience it in the pit of your stomach.

This has to be the closest Bigelow's come to pure horror since *Near Dark*, but even that comparison's left wanting. *Near Dark* was fantasy — the horror of *Detroit* has the sickening flash of reality, its true events backed up by Mark Boal's tenaciously researched screenplay. Bigelow is too cool-eyed to be blinded by sentiment or shock-tactics — she restages the Algiers Motel Incident as a compacted microcosm of the era's race-hate, powered by full-force performances. Boyega's security guard is a classic Bigelow character — a rigid professional compromised by fate and wedged in an impossible position: the locals see him as in cahoots with the powers-that-be; the cops see him as a second-class citizen. Boyega's in prime form here, while Poulter's casting as Detroit's dictatorial cop is a masterstroke: that

boyish face masking a cold bigot who, in the film's most chilling moment of dehumanising disgrace, declares the death-raid as just a game.

After its breath-stealing centrepiece, *Detroit*'s third act feels like a slow, rasping exhale. There is, inevitably, a leaking out of *Detroit*'s intensity, as if you've entered a decompression chamber, but the trauma lingers like toxic gas. Bigelow closes out the film with a genre-switch to courtroom drama as the cops and Dismukes are held to account in an all-white court with an all-white jury with a whitewash conclusion — an extended aftershock of institutional bias that offers no closure, no comfort and a devastating coda for Algee Smith's traumatised survivor. The Academy is notoriously wary when it comes to incendiary content, but if *Detroit* does become an Awards player, Smith's performance deserves to be honoured.

As with *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Detroit* has a clean, raw look, its lucid colour palette intensifying the

clarity of Bigelow's vision. A lot of the shots, especially during its early riot sequences, feel stolen rather than staged, charged up by visceral, smash-and-grab camerawork (the film is vividly lensed by Paul Greengrass' handheld warrior of choice, Barry Ackroyd). It's a technique that turns the passive viewer into an active witness, but let's remember: this film is for the fallen, then and now. It's for Michael Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner in New York, Ezell Ford in LA, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Dontre Hamilton in Milwaukee and countless other victims who've lost their lives to establishment prejudice. Black lives matter, but some deaths echo louder than most. Wake up, says *Detroit*. Wake up. **SIMON CROOK**

VERDICT A gruelling, nightmarish, ferociously vivid riot epic that recreates one of the darkest chapters in American history. Unflinching, unmissable and terrifyingly pertinent.



Deliveroo were taking their time.

AMERICAN PASTORAL



OUT 26 NOVEMBER
RATED M / 108 MINS

DIRECTOR Ewan McGregor

CAST Ewan McGregor, Jennifer Connelly, Dakota Fanning, David Strathairn

PLOT In post-war New Jersey, Seymour 'The Swede' Levov (McGregor) seems to have it all: a glittering sporting high-school record, a prosperous business, a beauty queen wife. But when his daughter gets involved in the violent politics of the 1960s, a seemingly perfect all-American family quickly crumbles.

EWAN MCGREGOR, THE actor, has frequently found himself drawn to challenging material — the heroin addiction of *Trainspotting*, the nourish bleakness of *Young Adam*, the sex and drugs of *Velvet Goldmine*. *American Pastoral*, therefore, certainly fits the bill for Ewan McGregor, the director. But a Pulitzer Prize-winning Philip Roth novel, juggling multiple hefty themes across several narrators of varying reliability, is an

ambitious task that would stretch even a seasoned director, let alone a first-timer. Alas, so it proves.

John Romano's script, which has to turn a deeply internal book into a largely external movie, streamlines Roth's disorderly timelines into a single narrative, bookended by scenes set in the present. It's here that we meet Roth surrogate Nathan Zuckerman (Strathairn), who learns his old friend, 'The Swede' (McGregor), has died.

This kick-starts Zuckerman reflecting on the life of The Swede, once the chiselled star of his high school — the prom king, an ace quarterback, and the paragon of a small Jewish community hoping to remedy the horror stories of the Holocaust by turning to a fair-skinned Jewish-American alpha male. "Our hero," he calls him. "Our Kennedy."

Post high school we learn the Swede enjoyed a bucolic life in rural New Jersey with his Gentile wife (Connelly) and his daughter, Merry (Fanning). When we first meet Merry, she is the apple of her father's eye, the nucleus of their nuclear family. But cracks in this perfect life soon emerge. Merry suffers from a debilitating stutter and, as a teenager, develops a rebellious streak, encouraged by the 1960s' turbulent politics. At 16, angry and radicalised, she commits a horrific act of terrorism — the American Dream is over.

In the novel, The Swede grapples with his

neutral politics as his family (and his country) respond with extremism. Reduced to the running time of a film and the speech of the characters, *American Pastoral* becomes one father's melodramatic quest to find his estranged daughter. The book has lofty things to say about a country in turmoil; the film has muddled things to say about a man whose life didn't pan out as he'd hoped.

But that's not the only thing that hasn't translated well. Roth's dialogue, so droll and deft on page, sounds broad and stagy on screen. "This... is America!" announces The Swede at one point, but fails to muster the authority the moment requires.

It's a shame, because the intent is genuine and wholehearted. This is a passion project for McGregor, and he brings a gentle incorruptibility to his performance. The period attention-to-detail is sharp, too, but resorts to obvious clichés: setting the scene with archive footage of Woodstock and the moon landing is as subtle as a tank in a model village. To borrow Roth's coinage, it could all do with being a little more untanklike.

JOHN NUGENT

VERDICT It's hard to begrudge such an earnest endeavour, but this is missing the wit, nuance, and insight of a book thought by many — correctly, maybe — to be unadaptable.



BATTLE OF THE SEXES



OUT NOW
RATED TBC / 121 MINS

DIRECTORS Jonathan Dayton, Valerie Faris
CAST Emma Stone, Steve Carell, Andrea Riseborough, Elisabeth Shue, Bill Pullman, Alan Cumming, Martha MacIsaac, Sarah Silverman

PLOT While at the top of her tennis game, Billy Jean King (Emma Stone) is challenged to an exhibition match with a former male pro (Steve Carell), where she must prove that when it comes to sport and to life, there's nothing inferior about her gender.

WHETHER OR NOT a film is considered enjoyable or not, a singular cinematic staple never fails to send a lump into most people's throats — a, enthusiastic crowd rousing at the moment of the hero's or heroes' triumph. Whether it's *The Karate Kid* or *School Of Rock* or even *Dodgeball*, big public wins can elicit some public tears of joy (or some quick emotional suppression to be flagged for future therapy).

The end of *Battle Of The Sexes*, when female Billy Jean King (Emma Stone) topples male Bobby Riggs (Steve Carell) in the then-most televised tennis match of all time, is the

first moment in recent memory where a crowd rouses at the moment of a hero's triumph and your innards likely won't stir a hair. And while it's easy to blame the fact the match's result is public knowledge, there's too many examples of true stories brought to film where a known outcome has still managed to deliver goosebumps (we're looking at you, *Apollo 13*).

Battle Of The Sexes isn't, by any stretch of the imagination, a bad or unsuccessfully made film, but considering it fictionalises a highly significant, symbolic moment in the public history of women's liberation,

why does it leave the viewer itching to check their phone?

One reason is the way in which Simon Beaufoy chooses to write Billie Jean King. She's depicted as some version of the perfect human being (even her infidelity with a woman is more indicative of the oppression of same-sex relationships during the time, than of any human weakness). This Billie Jean has no rough edges, no blind spot. She's a lovely, talented human being who is long-accustomed to great success. There's never any threat of her doing something undesirable, let alone lose a match that doubles up as a win for women. We meet her as a winner and leave her as a winner.

Another reason is the fact that her antagonist is out of her league in every possible way. He's abrasive, basic and completely unsympathetic — and even what would constitute his "evil" toolkit, his chauvinism, is depicted as a bit of a show in order to regain relevance. He's not worthy of her, neither as a sportsperson or human being. So on a story level, the historical event is stripped of most of its significance.

The third reason, and this is also to the film's credit, is that it ticks all of the boxes. All performances are well-tuned and practically seamless (Carell's comic sensibilities, while enviable, occasionally seem out of a different film). It looks pretty, and both intimate and elaborate sequences are tight and measured. We get our levity, our romance, our inspiring moments, and we also get a story that's about something — basically all the ingredients one would check off while making an Oscar-conscious film. But like this version of Billie Jean, *Battle Of The Sexes* is too perfect, too lacking necessary personalisation to ground it, and as a result, it's just another middling Hollywood biopic that reduces a larger-than-life tale to a mere tale. **JEREMY CASSAR**

VERDICT There's nothing overly wrong with *Battle Of The Sexes*, but it fails to do proper justice to both the genre, and this significant moment in popular history.



THREE SUMMERS



OUT 2 NOVEMBER / RATED M / 102 MINS

DIRECTOR Ben Elton

CAST Robert Sheehan, Rebecca Breeds, Michael Caton, Deborah Mailman, Magda Szubanski, John Waters, Kelton Pell

NO STRANGER TO ambition — this is, after all, the man who helped shape the musical sequel to *The Phantom Of The Opera* — British writer and comedian Ben Elton has set his sights on a romantic comedy that takes place over three years that features a sprawling ensemble cast and at least half-a-dozen plot lines all stitched together. Written and directed by the *Young Ones* and *Black Adder* veteran, Elton has described *Three Summers* as "Australia in a tent": a microcosm of our fair land and its people, all contained within the confines of the fictional 'Westival' music festival.

At the centre of this cultural stew is your classic mismatched rom-com couple: sparky fiddle-playing folkie Keevey (*Home And Away*'s Rebecca Breeds, who is arguably the best thing about the film) and the Irish Roland (Robert Sheehan from UK series *Misfits*), an insufferable Theremin-playing music snob who has no problem insulting anyone within earshot with his strong views.

Around the pair are a myriad of satellite players: Keevey's alcoholic father (John Waters); Deborah Mailman as a sympathetic AA counsellor; Michael Caton as a grouchy, anti-immigrant Morris dancer; Kelton Pell as the leader of an Indigenous dance troupe and Magda Szubanski as a community radio jock — and that's just scratching the surface.

Although there's an admirable attempt to include all walks of life, the sheer number of characters means they all get short thrift: people are painted in broad strokes, leading to a serving up of types rather than actual flesh-and-blood people. The humour is also wider than the stretch between WA and NSW, the film often lazily reaching for the easy laughs (several jokes revealing Elton's tenuous grasp on youth culture).

Three Summers may feel a bit clumsy in a middle-aged, drunk uncle kind of way, but it means well: there's some timely gap-bridging between Caton and Pell's characters and a comment on Australia's attitude towards immigration via a subplot involving a fostered Afghan refugee.

Ultimately though, like Australia itself, *Three Summers* is equal parts funny, daggy, a little misguided, sometimes embarrassing but more often than not full of heart. **JJ**



MOUNTAIN

★★★★★

OUT NOW / RATED TBC / 74 MINS

DIRECTOR Jennifer Peedom

CAST Willem Dafoe

IF YOU GET vertigo, look away now. This documentary by the director of *Sherpa* reaches dizzying heights not for the faint of heart. *Mountain* explores humanity's fear and fascination with putting their lives on the line to scale perilous heights. Soaring melodies from the Australian Chambers Orchestra accompany breathtaking shots of sheer cliffs and those mad enough to climb them. Willem Dafoe lends his voice to the vision, finding several different poetic ways to say "Mountains are majestic but also terrifying." Ultimately though, *Mountain* feels more like art than a movie. It's gorgeous, but perhaps less interesting for those who aren't adrenalin junkies or nature obsessed. **EB**



BLUE

★★★★★

OUT 12 OCTOBER / RATED PG / 76 MINS

DIRECTOR Karina Holden

CAST Valerie Taylor, Lucas Handley, Madison Stewart

"OCEAN IS THE mother of all life on this planet, but we don't recognise it," says Valerie Taylor, renowned conservationist and #oceanguardian. *Blue* is an Australian documentary that focuses on the devastating human impact on our marine life and how the ripples of destruction could travel far beyond the seashore. Did you know that 73 million sharks are killed every year, their fins consumed but bodies discarded? Or that in two decades, scientists estimate there will be more plastic than fish in the sea? Chilling facts are paired with footage both majestic and horrific to create a bleak, sobering look at Earth's fate if we continue to treat oceans with disregard for the future. Not the "feel good" flick of the year by any means, but certainly one that will promote thought and (hopefully) change. **ELIZABETH BEST**



FINAL PORTRAIT

★★★★★

OUT 5 OCTOBER

RATED M / 90 MINS

DIRECTOR Stanley Tucci

CAST Geoffrey Rush, Armie Hammer, Clémence Poésy

PLOT Early 1960s, France: American writer James Lord (Hammer) agrees to sit for a portrait for Alberto Giacometti (Rush). What begins as a straightforward portrait session stretches out to day after day of fruitless work as the mercurial Giacometti struggles to finish the painting.

MOVIES ABOUT ARTISTS can be a dicey proposition. Sometimes they work — *Love Is The Devil* gives you insights into Francis Bacon no academic text could — but more often you get Anthony Hopkins bellowing his way through *Surviving Picasso*. Maybe there's something about drawing too direct a line from the work to the artist that feels reductive on film. Tellingly, John Maybury's Bacon-opic couldn't show any of the paintings, so was forced to be creative.

Final Portrait elegantly dodges the 'life plus trauma plus easel equals art' trap by looking at French painter Alberto Giacometti (Rush) through specs that are anything but rose-tinted, and by focusing on the creation of one painting, the actual content of which is incidental. Instead, Stanley Tucci — here directing for the fifth time — brings an actor's understanding of creative insecurity to this biopic, Giacometti constantly disparaging his own talent, wiping out days' worth of work to start again and burning his old drawings.

Instead of some idealised view of art as some mystical alchemy, Tucci is far more interested in the conditions that lead to creativity, and the personality that creates them. This version of Giacometti lives in a kind of barely organised chaos, neglecting his wife (a subtle Sylvie Testud) while openly doting on his prostitute lover (Poésy, so vivacious here she would have *Nouvelle Vague*

directors chewing their *chapeaux*).

On some level, he seems to know that satisfaction and contentment are the enemies of art; this isn't some silly Silicon Valley view of creativity as play, but neither is it about some notion of art as therapy. Giacometti burns happiness and contentment as fuel for his work, and the subtle ways he consciously or unconsciously structures his environment for his art to flourish at the expense of those around him are fascinating. Only Tony Shalhoub's Diego, Giacometti's assistant and brother, seems to get it, as he constantly hangs in the background with a wry smile at his brother's self-flagellation, happy to manipulate him when the time comes.

As Giacometti's model, trapped in an endless loop of aborted portraits and postponed flights, Hammer does good work with a thin role, his syrupy voice and natural WASP-ishness filling gaps the script doesn't. Geoffrey Rush's flair for dissolution is well-used in the lead role, nailing Giacometti's near apathy to anything that's not work or booze, and delivering a near-silent opening that's as tense as any thriller. Hammer arrives for his close-up, and a grumbling, shuffling Rush shambles through his studio in a series of audaciously extended long takes. It's the kind of drawn-out opening you get in the theatre, confidently drawing you in — you can almost feel Tucci's years of treading the boards.

His direction elsewhere, mostly constrained to an amazingly detailed recreation of Giacometti's studio, is as alert to performance as you'd expect. Essentially an extended two-hander, this manages to feel at once theatrical in its unhurried contentment to just let two strong actors bounce off each other, but also cinematic in Tucci and DP Danny Cohen's elegant camerawork — a pretty rare combo. The net result is a mature and wise drama about the cost and benefits of creativity. Tucci should spend more time behind the camera. **ANDREW LOWRY**

VERDICT Sensibly dramatising a few representative days rather than Giacometti's whole life, this may seem slight, but there's a lot to dig into here — and Rush hasn't had a showcase this good in years.



KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE



OUT NOW
RATED M / 141 MINS

DIRECTOR Matthew Vaughn

CAST Taron Egerton, Colin Firth, Mark Strong, Julianne Moore, Jeff Bridges, Pedro Pascal, Channing Tatum, Halle Berry, Edward Holcroft

PLOT After all of the Kingsman are wiped out save Eggsy (Taron Egerton) and Merlin (Mark Strong), the pair team up with their US equivalent the Statesman to investigate the mysterious Golden Circle drug cartel, whose crazed head Poppy (Julianne Moore) has plans for world domination.

DIRECTOR MATTHEW VAUGHN'S

Kingsman: The Secret Service was a surprise hit in 2014 for a very good reason: while the 'B' spy franchises (Bond, Bourne) had grown increasingly dark and po-faced, here was a balls-to-the-wall spy flick that managed to match the sheer ludicrous fun of mid-era 007 with thrilling action and flagrant R-rated humour, once again making the world of double agents and assassins appear to be — regular attempts on your life aside — a fun place to work.

The major drawback in the first film was, of course, Taron Egerton's chav-turned-superspy Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin, a rough-around-the-edges scamp who went from council estate wastrel to Swedish princess-bedding world-saver over the course of 129 minutes. One of the inherent problems embedded in ramp-everything-up-to-eleven sequel *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* is that Eggsy's no longer the underdog: he may still swear like a sailor, but he's still the sharply dressed, highly-skilled spy we saw at the end of the first film, wholly capable of taking out a swathe of bad guys while barely getting so much as a minor crease in his thousand-pound suit.

After re-introducing our hero via an epic car

chase that starts on the streets of London and ends in Hyde Park, co-writers Vaughn and Jane Goldman set about trying to re-level the playing field: Every Kingsman bar Eggsy and Merlin (Mark Strong) are taken out by mysterious organisation The Golden Circle, the pair fleeing to the US to seek assistance from the secret spy organisation the Statesman, headed up by Champagne (Jeff Bridges in 'good ol' boy' mode). There they meet Tequila (Channing Tatum), Whiskey (Pedro Pascal) and Halle Berry's Ginger Ale, as well as come across an unexpected face: Harry 'Galahad' Hart (Colin Firth) — last seen getting shot in the face by Samuel L. Jackson's lisping Valentine in Part I — who is now suffering from amnesia.

Although Harry's return is a welcome one, it's here that *The Golden Circle* starts to derail: the details of his resurrection are incredulous at best, stretching believability in a franchise that has already seen the heads of the world's elite explode like fireworks. Harry's rehabilitation grinds the film to a near standstill, the actual plot — involving a beyond bonkers plan to hold the world to ransom in order to legalise drugs — not kicking in until 45 minutes into the film.

The action sequences are reliably great — a fight set on Italian ski slopes and a frenetic battle at Poppy's garish Cambodian base deliver thrills on par with the first film — but there's a tendency to fall into the sequel trap of "bigger is better".

Besides a perma-startled Elton John cameo that doesn't quite work, the cast are uniformly great and having a blast: there's joy to be had in watching Eggsy and Harry once again creatively slay bad guys, and new addition Whiskey — so gosh darn American you almost half expect him to reveal he's the Marlboro Man — is a hoot. Julianne Moore doesn't get to do much other than be permanently sunny with a twist of psycho, although she does score one of the greatest evil lairs ever to hit the big screen. JJ

VERDICT Ultimately *The Golden Circle* lacks the freshness and surprises of the original, going for sheer OTT excess instead. It doesn't always work, but the inventive action and Egerton-Firth combo should keep Kingsman fans happy.



BRIGSBY BEAR



OUT 26 OCTOBER / RATED M / 97 MINS

DIRECTOR Dave McCary

CAST Kyle Mooney, Mark Hamill, Jane Adams, Greg Kinnear, Claire Danes

JAMES POPE (*SATURDAY Night Live* upstart Kyle Mooney) lives cocooned in a bunker with his parents, never leaving due to the deathly toxicity of the outside air. He passes the time by hanging out with hundreds of volumes of the straight-to-VHS children's sci-fi series *Brigsby Bear*, an obsession that by comparison makes Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction* look like a mere distant admirer. A perpetual child on his way to 30, James knows nothing of the wider world, but luckily he's got the still-airing world of *Brigsby Bear*.

Or does he? Thanks to the double-arrest of his parents, James discovers that he was kidnapped as a boy, and he's returned to his real, still-grieving parents in the suburbs. The wider world is now his playground, but, as his fake dad was the only person who could get his hands on fresh *Brigsby* eps, that man-sized bear is now a thing of the past. Unless, of course, James finds a way to take the reigns and see *Brigsby's* low-budget story continue.

This set-up is *Brigsby Bear's* main drawback. The first half moves along at a clip, as James, out of water like some hipster Nemo, collides with the vastness of Earth and its inhabitants, while introducing it and them to his best friend — that TV show. Watching him navigate the newness while maintaining his old obsession is fun, and funny, and relatively original.

However, it seems the creators were so pumped by their high-concept through-line and throwback aesthetic, that niggling stuff like plot plausibility and character connection didn't matter — and maybe they don't. Outside the big idea, the film is a crazy handful of glorious nothings — those that work are pure, guiltless, A+ grade entertainment and those that don't, don't with such competence — moments are often so fascinatingly lazy or undercooked that you can't help but find them amusing. Whichever the case, chances are you'll leave the cinema wearing more than one exaggerated facial expression. JEREMY CASSAR



THE DANCER

★★★★★

OUT NOW / RATED M / 112 MINS

DIRECTOR Stéphanie Di Giusto

CAST Soko, Gaspard Ulliel, Mélanie Thierry

AS LOOSELY BASED on the life of trendsetting dancer Louie Fuller as is cinematically possible, *The Dancer* is a gorgeous-looking 19th century epic that may as well have been cooked up by Roche as a more potent alternative to *Valium*. After Fuller's (Soko) father kicks the bucket, she leaves the Wild West and bunks up in New York with her mother, then saves herself from an inelegant stumble while dabbling in stage acting and accidentally invents the now-classic 'Serpentine Dance'. That's the most captivating sequence of events in this excruciatingly lifeless biopic, after which you're forced to sit through 112 minutes of allegedly poignant shenanigans overcompensated by an overblown orchestral score. If you're a fan of stilted acting, on-the-nose dialogue, porous motivations, and a whole lot of spot-lit twirling, then don't miss *The Dancer*. **JEREMY CASSAR**



TOM OF FINLAND

★★★★★

OUT 12 OCTOBER / RATED TBC / 114 MINS

DIRECTOR Dome Karukoski

CAST Pekka Strang, Lauri Tilkanen, Jessica Grabowsky, Taisto Oksanen

A MAJOR INFLUENCE on everyone from Robert Mapplethorpe to The Village People, Tom of Finland's monochrome drawings of well-hung hunks are instantly recognisable. The life of their creator, Touko Laaksonen, is less familiar, however, and it's chronicled with sincerity, if not exactly trenchancy in this handsome biopic. Director Dome Karukoski takes his time establishing the oppressive Finnish setting before hurtling through events and epidemics that occurred after Laaksonen conquered America. Ageing 50 years, Pekka Strang poignantly portrays a gentle man whose attitudes and art were shaped by his wartime experiences and a refusal to be untrue to himself. But too many issues are skirted for this to be a definitive study. **DP**



SONG TO SONG

★★★★★

OUT 5 OCTOBER

RATED M / 128 MINS

DIRECTOR Terrence Malick

CAST Michael Fassbender, Ryan Gosling, Rooney Mara, Natalie Portman

PLOT Texas. Struggling musician Faye (Mara) is drawn to both good guy songwriter BV (Gosling) and manipulative music mogul Cook (Fassbender). The relationships get strained when Cook screws BV over a copyright issue and offers Faye a recording contract, and then the situation becomes more complex when new partners enter the picture.

WELCOME BACK TO Malickland, the perma-twilight world where Hollywood's most beautiful wander around fields/beaches/city underpasses while their disconnected musings whisper on the soundtrack. Terrence Malick's eighth drama doesn't deviate a jot from his normal MO. Thematically, it is perhaps closest to the portrayal of jealousy and betrayal in 2012's *To The Wonder*, but Malick finds a more engaging iteration of these emotions, still shot through with formally exquisite filmmaking but buoyed by the movie-star charisma of Michael Fassbender, Rooney Mara and particularly Ryan Gosling.

In outline, *Song To Song* is a simple relationship drama about an aspiring musician, Faye (Mara), who flits between likeable songwriter BV (Gosling), and predatory music producer Cook (Fassbender, doing his pervy scoundrel thing) — we know he is dark because he has a big, glass house and serves entrées off the bellies of naked women. Yet, in Malick's hands, this wisp of a plot becomes a framework to hang a series of fragments illustrating the film's central idea — the search for living an authentic life, be it through romantic love, parental connections, sex or music. Malick certainly doesn't shy away from Big Themes: nature versus grace, the difficulty of monogamy and the difference

between our public and private lives all come under the microscope.

But this is Malick at his most accessible. Like the Fernando's sections of *Take Me Out* directed by the world's most visually adept filmmaker, we get to hang out with Faye and BV as they go to gigs, goof around in open-top cars and throw loo rolls from high-rise buildings. At one point Fassbender even does an orangutan impression. You have to work to join the dots, but particularly in the Faye/BV scenes, the vignettes take on a beautiful, almost balletic quality. If nothing else, the film will keep Twitter in Movie Stars Do Cute Things gifs for years.

The musical element also serves to enliven Malick as well. Set against the backdrop of SXSW, we get cameos by Patti Smith, Iggy Pop, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Lykke Li and John Lydon and the soundtrack pulses with an eclectic mix of EDM, classical, '50s pop and singer-songwriter-y musings. Malick also throws up Val Kilmer chainsawing an amp in front of a baying crowd. Once seen, never forgotten.

It's when the character's lives get more complex that the limitations in Malick's performance-art aesthetic become more apparent. As Faye, BV and Cook fall into relationships with different people, it cries out for well-rounded characters, motivations and context. Natalie Portman does terrific work as a waitress who falls under Cook's spell, but Cate Blanchett as BV's new flame barely registers and Bérénice Marlohe, as Faye's partner, feels like a fantasy figure.

In the end, Malick isn't interested in prose, only poetry. A recurring image is a mosh pit in all its aggressive, sweaty glory that speaks to the film's manifesto of living from "song to song, kiss to kiss". This is what Malick's film (and cinema) does. And of course, it is the most beautiful, lyrical mosh pit you've ever seen. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT Never reaching the heights of Malick's '70s heyday (what does?), *Song To Song* represents some kind of return to form following *Knight Of Cups*. It won't convert the unconvinced, but it is beautiful, melancholic, audacious and well-played, a refinement rather than reinvention of a singular filmmaker.



THE BELKO EXPERIMENT



OUT NOW
RATED MA15+ / 89 MINS

DIRECTOR Greg McLean

CAST John Gallagher Jr., Tony Goldwyn, John C. McGinley, Adria Arjona, Sean Gunn

PLOT American workers in the Colombian office of the Belko Corporation are locked inside their hi-tech building and told by a disembodied voice that they have to kill each other to stay alive.

THERE ARE TWO sides to James Gunn. One side contains the family-friendly blockbuster guy, who can write and direct great big crowdpleasers like *Guardians Of The Galaxy* (both volumes) and (for better or worse) bring *Scooby-Doo* to the silver screen.

Then there's the other side — let's call it the smoking Gunn. The horror nut behind the gore-fuelled likes of the terrifically entertaining *Slither*, the dark, uncompromising *Super* and Zack Snyder's *Dawn Of The Dead* remake. That's the Gunn we get here with *The Belko Experiment*. It's something of a pet project of Gunn's, who wrote it several years ago but couldn't spare the time from guarding the galaxy to direct it, so he remains on writing/producing duties, entrusting the yelling-through-a-megaphone-and-doing-that-little-rectangle-box-thing-with-your-fingers stuff to *Wolf Creek*'s Greg McLean. It looks like a match made in horror heaven. And, for a while, it is.

Plot-wise, it's *The Hunger Games* with an HR department. More overtly, it's *Battle Royale* in the boardroom, right down to the exploding heads for non-compliance. The first hour is pretty terrific, introducing us adroitly to quite a large group (there are 80 employees in the building) and establishing the workplace hierarchy. There's the big boss (Goldwyn); the ambitious

underlings; the co-workers caught up in a clandestine affair; the new girl; the engineers who know the place inside out; the mother hens... and on and on. And, because we know most of these people will end the day in possession of the ultimate firing, there's tension right away. We know that there's a ticking time bomb about to consume these people. Once it goes off, with heads popping all over the place, the pace never lets up. However, rather than a wicked satire about the lengths to which colleagues will go to screw each other for a goddamn percentage or, indeed, a piece about America's place in the world (the Colombia setting is fairly pointless; this could have been Anywhere, USA), it becomes a rather heavy-handed fight for survival.

Gunn has always been a wonderful writer — he's the guy who managed to make us care about a talking tree, after all — but these characters rarely pop off the page. The film's notional hero, Mike (Gallagher Jr.), is a wet blanket in whom it's hard to invest. And while the stage is set for grandstanding turns from stalwart character actors like Michael Rooker and John C. McGinley, they're not given enough to do. The great psycho killer performance the film is crying out for never quite materialises.

There are few surprises here, which may be the biggest surprise of all. The second half, which doesn't live up to the promise of the first and becomes a bludgeoning race to the finish line, will please some gore fans with its headshots and axes to the face. McLean handles the mayhem well, but it's a film that is crying out for a little more flair. Save for inventive use of a Sellotape dispenser, it's also fairly uninspired in its use of workplace weaponry, relying instead on a convenient arsenal of guns to mete out the murder. There's no doubt which side of James Gunn wins out here, but you end up wishing the guy who made *Guardians* such a joy had showed up.

CHRIS HEWITT

VERDICT A brutal, bloody battle royale that glides along nicely until a disappointing dip in the second half. Still, there are plenty of positive results from this experiment, especially for gore fans.



MOTHER!



OUT NOW / RATED MA15+ / 121 MINS

DIRECTOR Darren Aronofsky

CAST Jennifer Lawrence, Javier Bardem

LIKE HARD CRACKLING, Darren Aronofsky's *mother!* is not an easy film to swallow. But, hell, it gives you a lot to chew on. Is it a psycho-horror? Sure, in part. A surrealist satire? Yes, that too. A black comedy? At times. A visual metaphysical poem? Oh, go on then. It starts out like a stab at doing Pinter — a jagged chamber piece on why hell is well and truly other people — then metamorphoses into a kind of indoor *Children Of Men*. There are shades of Ben Wheatley's take on *High-Rise*, echoes of Nicolas Winding Refn's queasy-beautiful *The Neon Demon*, a wedge of Lars von Trier and a few tonal call-backs to Aronofsky's own *Black Swan*. In short, it's gorgeous, distressing and utterly confounding all at once.

Slap-bang at the centre of all its bewildering meta-twists is Jennifer Lawrence — proving she can do what she damn well pleases these days and do it damn well — as the unnamed muse of Javier Bardem's creatively constipated poet. He's unnamed, as every character here is, ringing an alarm bell that what we're witnessing is perhaps a few steps left of what we'd usually consider reality. Every shot of the film is either tight in on Lawrence or presenting her point of view. Another alarm bell, that we're dealing purely with the subjective in this narrative. But it makes for an intense experience, a sometimes disorientating sidecar-whirl around one woman's nightmare.

Aronofsky isn't one to shy away from metaphor. He's always liked his fat and ripe (as you'll know if you've seen *The Fountain*). But in *mother!* he squishes them to pigment and daubs the bloody walls with them. Religion, history, the media, sexual politics, the crumbling of civilisation, creativity itself — it's all interior decoration for Aronofsky. It'll prove too garish for many, culminating in one sequence so fracturingly brutal and awful it's guaranteed to upset even those who've identified (what we're pretty sure is) Aronofsky's point. The film definitely earns its 'not for everyone' caveat. But at least it has something to say — almost too much, you could argue. For all its discomfiting flourishes and occasional blunders, it's hardly a hollow construction and far from forgettable. Like all our most vivid bad dreams, it snags the mind. With barbs. **AE**



THE JEDI RETURNS

ONCE THE GOLDEN BOY OF THE REBELLION, LUKE SKYWALKER IS NOW A HERMIT ON A FAR-FAR-AWAY PLANET. CAN PLUCKY PADAWAN REY PERSUADE HIM TO RETURN TO THE FRAY? DIRECTOR RIAN JOHNSON AND STAR MARK HAMILL SET THE SCENE FOR **STAR WARS: THE LAST JEDI**

WORDS JAMES DYER







SAN QUENTIN PRISON, STANDING-

room-only venue for Johnny Cash and the former residence of both Charles Manson and Danny Trejo, is the most famous landmark in Marin County, California. The second is built around a striking cream and grey house with candy-striped blue awnings on the aptly named Lucas Valley Road. If there's a bright centre to the *Star Wars* universe, then this property, with

its view across Lake Ewok, is most definitely it.

Skywalker Ranch has been the spiritual home of *Star Wars* since George Lucas bought it in 1978. Home to Lucas' offices, Skywalker Sound and a small vineyard producing a surprisingly cheeky Pinot Noir, the ranch has nurtured almost every *Star Wars* project since *The Empire Strikes Back*. It's rumoured to have cost Lucas \$100 million, but the ranch's true value is found in a nondescript barn, tucked behind the stables.

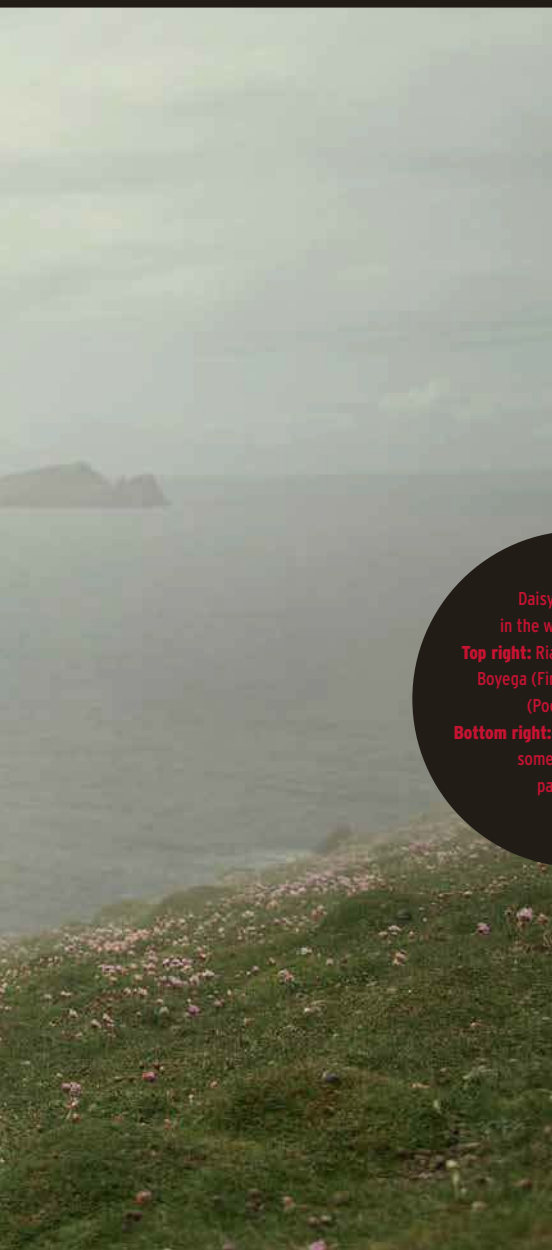
Within that building resides the Lucasfilm archives, home to almost every prop, costume and artefact that has gone into the *Star Wars* saga over the course of 40 years. Upon its endless shelves, model X-Wings lie scattered like children's toys, jumbled among alien maquettes and several prototypes for the Millennium Falcon that resemble an android's sex toys. Near an arsenal of blasters, lightsabers and abandoned gaffi sticks gleams *Raiders'* Ark Of The Covenant and, tucked behind it, the gurning likeness of Harrison Ford, still frozen in grey carbonite. Search and you'll even find Vader's

final helmet, drooping and crispy from the Endor pyre — a scene shot right here at the ranch during last-minute pick-ups in 1983.

If you were searching for inspiration on how to continue the *Star Wars* saga, there can be few more potent places in the galaxy than this.

"I spent days there," marvels Rian Johnson, with a wistful smile. "Just being alone in the archives among all these models and props and soaking it all in. It was incredible! The perception of these films is that they're all planned out on a secret sheet of paper in advance, but that's just not the case. I wasn't given an outline of where it goes or even a list of things to hit. It really was just, 'Okay, what's next?'"

Unlike Luke Skywalker, *The Force Awakens* director J.J. Abrams left no cryptic trail to the story's next location, no map hidden in the memory of a catatonic droid. Having introduced a new Force user in Daisy Ridley's Rey, Abrams' tale ended on the archipelagian water planet of Ahch-To, with a time-worn Jedi Master staring into the eyes of this young woman as she held



Left:

Daisy Ridley's Rey
in the wilds of Ahch-To.

Top right: Rian Johnson with John
Boyega (Finn) and Oscar Isaac
(Poe Dameron).

Bottom right: Johnson gives Chewie
some pan-galactic
parking tips.



out an artefact long thought lost. That was it. One helicopter shot, a John Williams fanfare and 10 minutes of credits. Not so much as a hint as to what might happen next.

So, with Abrams' Ahch-Tosian cliffhanger as a starting point, Johnson forced himself to look at *Star Wars*' reluctant hero in a new light.

"Who is Luke Skywalker? But more than that, who's Luke Skywalker *now*? I grew up with an idea of who Luke was, so the real question was why is Luke on that island? Luke's no coward, he's not hiding from a fight, so there must be some reason he's there that makes sense to him. That was the first nut to crack. The seed for the whole story was inside that shell. I just had to get to it."

More than three decades after turning his back on the galaxy, Luke Skywalker leads a very different existence. Grizzled and world-weary, he is a man apart, divested of the life he knew and wrestling with the demons of his past. Until, that is, unheralded and unexpected, a would-be apprentice tracks him down. At the end of a long pilgrimage, they climb the endless, weather-

beaten steps to his Malibu home and find the Jedi Master alone in his reverie. Skywalker, confronted by this petitioner, sets a very specific task.

"He made me watch *Sgt. Bilko*," says Johnson. "I'd gone out to Mark's house to meet him and he couldn't believe I'd never seen it. So he took me into his man-cave and we hung out and watched old TV together."

The episode in question — in which Zippy the chimp is accidentally inducted into the army and subsequently court-martialled — is, one might argue, not the most obvious place to begin a crash course in *Star Wars* Episode-writing. But as the pair kicked back to watch Phil Silvers' uniformed blowhard in action, Hamill began to talk. He told stories of Peter Cushing and Sir Alec Guinness — younger then than Hamill is now. Of long days at Elstree Studios and wild nights in London town. From Tunisian sand to Dagobah slime and that final reckoning in the skies over Endor, Hamill recalled the saga from Luke's perspective. Johnson listened and, as he did, a story began to coalesce.

"I had a couple of keystone ideas, then I just

started freeform writing with each of the characters," he says. "What do I know about them? Where do I want to see them go? What would be the toughest thing each of them could be faced with? I started this big document that ended up growing and growing and eventually a through-line started to become clear."

If Luke had found the first Jedi temple amid the rocks and heather of Ahch-To, what could that mean? What lay within? More importantly, why did he need it? Betrayed by his pupil — his nephew, Ben Solo — and his fledgling Jedi all corrupted or killed, might Luke, like Obi-Wan before him, have sought solace in exile? And what might happen when that isolation ended?

"I was terrified coming into this that I was gonna be like Barton Fink and have a script that was due six months ago and I'm still on page three writing about fishmongers," Johnson laughs. "But it's the most fun I've ever had writing something. The whole experience was incredible: just tapping into my 10-year-old self. Even though it's *Star Wars*, the whole thing

has felt bizarrely similar to my experience making *Looper* or *Brick* or *The Brothers Bloom*.”

The 43-year-old director, known for that trio of offbeat indies and directing the best episode of *Breaking Bad*, pieced *The Last Jedi* together moment by moment. He had a title (“That came very early on, it just seemed obvious”), a story and Luke Skywalker: a central character at once familiar and, he teases, completely unexpected.

“OH BABY, WOULD I LOVE TO PLAY

my own evil twin!” Mark Hamill declares, bouncing with delight at the prospect. “It’d be great because you could maybe not reveal it’s Evil Luke until the real Luke shows up. We could watch this guy undermining the good guys secretly, maybe even *killing* a supporting character out of everyone’s sight so they all go, ‘What’s going on? He’s crazy!’ And then, of course, the good Luke shows up.”

This, it should be emphasised, is *not* the plot for *The Last Jedi*, nor Johnson’s answer to the Skywalker mystery. It is, rather, Hamill’s own take on where the Rebellion’s storied hero should have ended up — one he’s still sore was given short-shrift.

“When I suggested that storyline, they said, ‘Well, it’s been done.’” He looks genuinely crestfallen, then dismisses the objection with a wave. “Apparently, in one of the *Star Wars* novels they clone an evil Luke from the hand that got cut off. Over the years there have been so many permutations of these characters that there’s not much left. It’s really limiting!”

Hamill is, by his own admission, a “fountain of really terrible ideas”, from lobbying George Lucas to make Boba Fett Luke’s mother in disguise (“She’s working as a double agent, see?”) to a far more hands-on climax for *The Force Awakens* (“Leia contacts me telepathically, I enter, deal with the danger and rush to Solo’s side!”). But while he’s hardly surprised that his wild imaginings were set aside, he had expected J.J. Abrams would give him a little more to do.

After nearly a year of intensive training and a diet that would put most Olympic sprinters to shame (“I haven’t seen a French fry since the summer of 2012”), Hamill was handed a role that consisted of one scene, two shots and no dialogue.

“J.J. is a sadist,” he grumbles. “If he had confided in me that the whole movie is them searching for me then that would have been fine. Instead he said, ‘I’m sending the script over. Read it from page one and imagine it just like a movie.’ I’ll tell you this: when I got the script for *Episode VIII*, I turned to the last page and started reading it backwards!”

The Force Awakens might have been a film about Luke Skywalker, but *The Last Jedi* is Luke Skywalker’s film. Missing for decades, his trusty X-Wing rusting and barnacled beneath the waves, Luke finds redemption in the form of Rey: a scavenger from the arid wastes of Jakku; a would-be Padawan, already strong in the Force. Self-taught and coursing with a Jedi’s power, she looks to Skywalker for guidance and he, however reluctantly, agrees to teach her. It is not, Hamill

Shiny
evil people:
Gwendoline Christie’s
towering Captain Phasma, clearly
none the worse for a stint
in the Starkiller Base trash compactor.

tells us, the kind of training we are used to (“Rey doesn’t run around with me in her backpack”), nor is Skywalker the teacher Rey was hoping for.

“He’s changed a lot,” says Hamill. “It was as shocking for me to read what Rian had written as I’m sure it will be for the audience. I was surprised by the way he saw Luke — to hear him say something like, ‘It’s time for the Jedi to end’ — and I wasn’t even sure I agreed with it. Being the caretaker of the character I have a possessive attitude towards him, but even though it’s not the way I would have gone, the more I got into the work, the more I realised I was wrong.”

THE FORCE AWAKENS, WITH ITS stolen plans, plucky orphan and structurally flawed doomsday weapon, was an unabapologetic homage to the original *Star Wars*: a love letter from J.J. Abrams to the film that shaped his childhood. Rather than try to reinvent Lucas’ space opera, Abrams chose to revitalise it, updating the Empire with the First Order and continuing Vader’s legacy through the volatile

Kylo Ren. Stormtroopers were streamlined, X-wings upgraded and, with Rey and John Boyega’s Finn, a new generation of heroes strode forth to delight a new generation of fans.

For the old guard, the film’s emotional punch was a haymaker: old friends returned and were abruptly taken away, leaving us stunned as Han Solo’s lifeless body tumbled into the abyss. And Luke, the boy we met four decades ago as he gazed hopefully out at those twin suns, returned an old hermit, silent and glaring on a windswept promontory. Excitement? Adventure? A Jedi craves not these things, but for audiences drinking in *Episode VII*, it was everything they’d dreamed *Star Wars*’ return would be.

And now Rian Johnson has to follow it. Because if *The Force Awakens* was Abrams’ *Star Wars*, then *The Last Jedi* needs to be Johnson’s *The Empire Strikes Back*.

“This is the second movie in the trilogy, so it’s easy to draw parallels to *Empire* in terms of a darker feel,” says Johnson. “And we do dig into the characters: we’re going to challenge them and things





NO SNOKE WITHOUT FIRE

FIVE SUPREME LEADER
THEORIES REVEALED

ILLUSTRATION BILL MCCONKEY

DARTH PLAGUEIS

The king of Snoke theories. Palpatine tells Anakin the story of Darth Plagueis at the floaty bubble opera thing in *Revenge Of The Sith*. Steeped in the Force, Plagueis is a Muun – tall, thin, ancient-looking – not dissimilar to Snoke.

AS SEEN ON: Looper.com

MACE WINDU

Windu turned to the dark side in a vendetta to kill Anakin Skywalker's offspring, Palpatine's Force lightning altering his appearance. Why you'd get Andy Serkis rather than Samuel L. Jackson to performance-capture that is a mystery.

AS SEEN ON: Inverse.com

VANEÉ

Vaneé is Darth Vader's cloaked aide who informs the Sith Lord of Krennic's arrival in *Rogue One*. A supposed acolyte of Vader, the speculation posits that Vaneé vows to manipulate Vader's grandson – Kylo Ren – to the dark side and explains how Ren is in possession of Vader's mask.

AS SEEN ON: Fandom.wikia.com

ANAKIN'S FATHER

You'll remember that Anakin Skywalker is the product of an immaculate conception. But one theory predicts that Snoke will be revealed as Anakin's absentee father, giving *The Last Jedi* an *Empire Strikes Back* reveal.

AS SEEN ON: Cheatsheet.com

A NEW CHARACTER

Chuck Wendig's *Force Awakens* prequel novel *Aftermath* suggested that post-*Jedi* the last vestiges of the Empire fled to the Unknown Regions. Could they have met a non-humanoid called Snoke who shaped them into the First Order? Or maybe he's just Mike Snoke from downtown Coruscant.

AS SEEN ON: Screenrant.com

are gonna get tough for everybody. But I didn't want this to go *too* dark. One of the things I drew from J.J.'s film was that sense of fun and playfulness — that's as much *Star Wars* as, 'I am your father.'"

Johnson's primary addition to *Star Wars* cartography involves a riot of bright lights and a skyline that pulses like the Las Vegas Strip. In fact, if the Bellagio expanded to cover half the Mojave desert, replacing every highway and byway with glittering game halls and bug-eyed high-rollers, it might come close to the decadent opulence of Canto Bight. This sprawling casino city, where the galaxy's elite come to flaunt their frippery and squander credits on games of chance, hosts one of *The Last Jedi*'s showpieces.

"I wanted a new environment that was like dunking your head in a cool bath of water, right in the middle of movie," Johnson explains. "Apart from the prequels, all the touchstones that make something feel like *Star Wars* involve griminess and dirt. I wanted something completely different. I thought, 'What would the Monte Carlo of the *Star Wars* universe look like?'"

Inside one of its many gambling dens, a dog-faced alien throws many-faced dice across a red-felted table, while a yak-faced creature wearing piebald jodhpurs lays out a winning hand of sabacc. With a menagerie of patrons born from Neal Scanlan's creature shop rather than the servers at ILM, Canto Bight was as vibrant offscreen as on, its creatures working tables and playing games as Johnson walked the floor between takes, drinking in the ambience.

"It's like Mos Eisley but they're all rich jerks, as opposed to slimy, underworld guys," he notes. "They're actually worse: they're slimy underworld guys wearing tuxedos and driving yachts."

Less slimy but equally shady is Benicio Del Toro's D.J., a glowering addition to the film's roster with a dangerous mien and high-collared trench coat like a Deckard hand-me-down. Also introduced is Vice-Admiral Amilyn Holdo, a violet-haired Resistance officer played by Laura Dern, plucky grease-monkey Rose Tico, (Kelly Marie Tran) and her sister Paige (Veronica Ngo). Johnson talks animatedly



about expanding the *Star Wars* ranks, developing the film's young heroes and peeling back the layers of Hamill's weathered Jedi. But through it all, talk of one character in particular brings the director bubbling to life. Quicker, easier, more seductive: everybody loves the dark side.

"Writing Kylo Ren is just so much fun," he says, unable to suppress a toothy grin. "*Star Wars* boils down to the transition from adolescence into adulthood. That's the heart of these films and Rey is most obviously the one that hangs on. But it's also Kylo. In the originals you project entirely onto Luke, while Vader is the scary other — he's the minotaur. The fascinating thing about Kylo and Rey is that they're two sides of something. We can all relate to Kylo: to that anger of being in the turmoil of adolescence and figuring out who he's going to be as a man; dealing with anger and wanting to separate from his family. He's not Vader — at least, he's not Vader *yet* — and that's something I really wanted to get into."

Scarred both outside and in after his ill-fated forest duel with Rey, Adam Driver's Kylo Ren

begins *The Last Jedi* recalled by his master for new orders and, we can assume, a fairly stern talking to. As for the First Order's Supreme Leader, seen thus far only through a gargantuan hologram, *Episode VIII* will finally reveal Andy Serkis' Snoke in the flesh (see sidebar). But don't expect to see the character's inner self laid bare. Johnson is of the opinion that, as far as big bads are concerned, less is decidedly more: Snoke works most effectively from the shadows.

"We got the whole story of Palpatine's rise to power in the prequels, but in the original films he's exactly what he needs to be, which is just 'the Emperor'. He's a dark force: the scary thing behind the thing. That was entirely how I approached Snoke. I wasn't interested in explaining where he came from or telling his history, except where it serves this story."

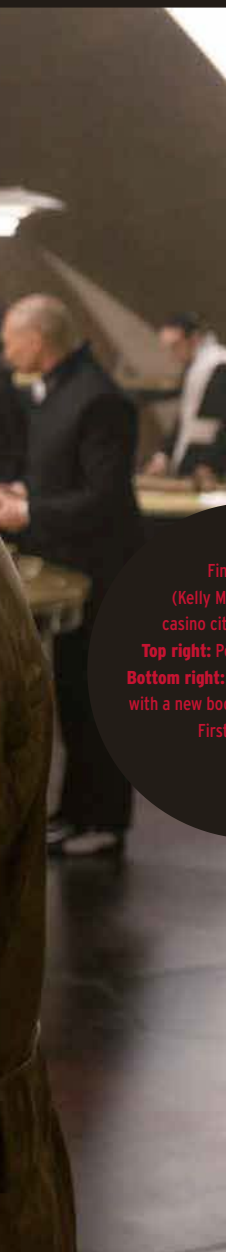
What we will discover is what happens to Finn after his near-fatal 'saber wound, if the New Republic survives the destruction of its capital on Hosnian Prime, and how the First Order overcomes the loss of its super-weapon. We'll see

echoes of *Episode V* as Rey begins her training and Assault Walkers battle Resistance skimmers on the salt flats of Crait. We'll also return to Ahch-To, to finally get an answer to the Skywalker question that kick-started this whole endeavour.

"IT WAS ONE THING TO DO

Episode VII, where I don't really do any heavy lifting," reflects Hamill. "If it all crashed and burned, it's not *my* fault. But the pressure here is just enormous. I love performing off Broadway, or the anonymity of animation. There's a comfort level there. With *Star Wars*, Jesus! It's just too much and it never goes away. It's terrifying and sometimes I don't want to deal with that anymore. It was fun when I was in my twenties, but now..."

With box-office receipts totalling more than \$2 billion, *The Force Awakens* casts a very large shadow and, as he now steps to the fore, it's easy to see why Hamill is anxious about the immediate future. He, like Skywalker himself, has been in exile a very long time. Yet when



Left:

Finn and Rose

(Kelly Marie Tran) in the casino city of Canto Brite.

Top right: Poe Dameron on deck.

Bottom right: Poe's X-Wing, outfitted with a new booster to outmanoeuvre First Order guns.



conversation turns to the past, he visibly relaxes, any hint of trepidation dissolving in fond remembrance. Listening to Hamill reel off anecdotes about making the original trilogy must surely rank among life's great pleasures; it's easy to see how he stoked Johnson's enthusiasm all those months ago.

"Remember when Han Solo turns to me in the Millennium Falcon's turret and says 'Great, kid. Don't get cocky!?' That was completely ad-libbed by Harrison. Every time I wanted to change a line in *Star Wars* I'd ask George first and he'd go, 'No, let's just do it like it's written.' But Harrison said, 'Don't ask him, just do it! A lot of the time he doesn't even fucking notice.' So that's what we did. That bit on the Death Star when I say, 'I can't see a thing out of this helmet.' That was just something I said in rehearsals!"

Forty years on, the stakes have been raised significantly. Fans cling like mynocks to the scantest sliver of plot, from a glimpse of Finn and Rose in First Order uniforms (Do they infiltrate Snoke's base? Where? How?) to a brief

look at Ahch-To's indigenous space-puffins, the Porgs. Expectation is huge but Johnson, unlike Hamill, appears entirely unfazed, letting it all wash over him with casual insouciance. It's either the breezy calm of a man in denial or the unshakeable faith of someone who knows he's just made a damned good film.

"I'm zen," he says, cool as you like. "I'm just looking forward to seeing how people bounce off this movie. With *Star Wars* fandom, which I've been a part of for 40 years, it's always a complicated reaction. But it's one I'm looking forward to — both the good and the bad."

In four months, Johnson's *Episode* will be among us, his vision of the last Jedi laid out for all to see. Who is Luke Skywalker? Jedi master? Absolutely. Hero of the Rebellion? Sure. Whinging farm boy in need of some power converters? That too. But who is he *really*? What happens to an Outer Rim bumpkin when he becomes the last guardian of truth and justice in the galaxy? When he de-thrones the Emperor and dis-arms the Dark Lord Of The Sith? Where does he go? What does he become?

"That's the question I started with and the most interesting way to answer it was to make this movie," he stonewalls. "It's what I want people to go in asking and what I want them to discover during the course of the movie."

And then Johnson will be on his way, leaving it to another director (Colin Trevorrow exited after this story was written) to finish the saga.

"They didn't direct me and I haven't handed Colin an outline of where I think it goes next. He's gonna react to what he feels is emotionally resonant and figure out where it makes sense to go from here."

No words of wisdom? No parting advice? Might Johnson become Trevorrow's Jedi Master, as Hamill has been for him?

"I don't know about that, man. We'll see," he laughs. "I just hope I'm not his Greedo."

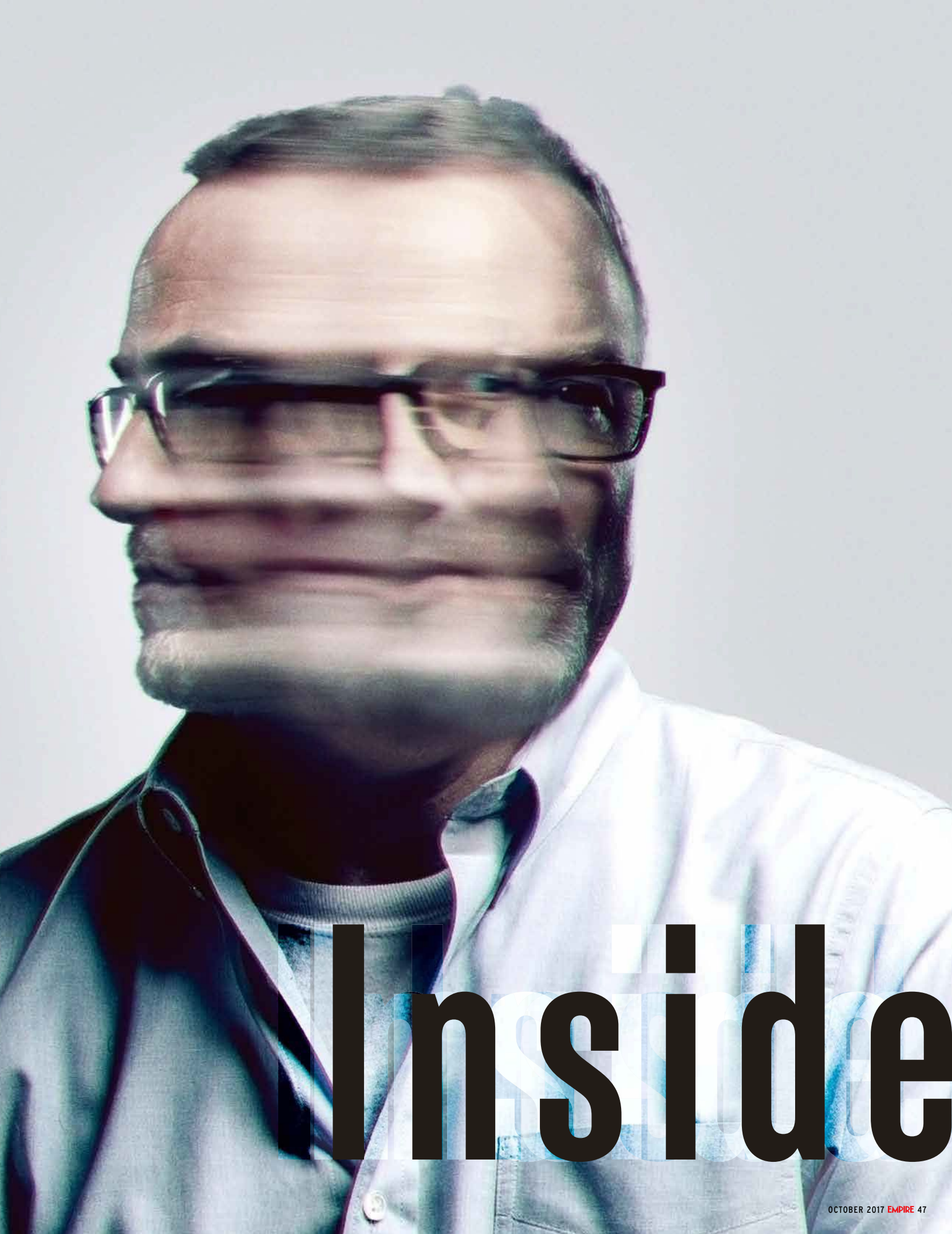
At least in this case we know for certain who shot first. ●

STAR WARS: THE LAST JEDI IS IN CINEMAS FROM 14 DECEMBER

The Killers

WORDS **NEV PIERCE** PORTRAITS **MARIUS BUGGE** DIGITAL IMAGING **JUSTIN METZ**

DIRECTOR DAVID FINCHER'S OBSESSION WITH
SERIAL KILLERS BROUGHT US *SEVEN* AND *ZODIAC*.
NOW HE'S RETURNING TO THE SUBJECT AGAIN
WITH *MINDHUNTER*, THIS TIME AIMING TO GET
INSIDE THEIR MINDS LIKE NO-ONE HAS BEFORE



Inside

"I DON'T WANT WHOEVER DID THIS KILLED," SAYS DAVID FINCHER, "BUT I DO WANT A DIGIT."

It's a crisp September morning in 2016 and the 54-year-old director is standing amid his crew in the lobby of a police station in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, doubling for the late '70s Adairsville Police Department, Georgia. He's brandishing his new show's "sides" in his hand: the day's script pages, which have been stapled together in the wrong order. "Okay, we're almost ready," he calls out, unpicking staples. "Bring in the master thespians!"

Moments later, the lead actors of *MINDHUNTER* walk across the room's sapphire-tiled floor, past a cigarette machine and a wall plastered with "Wanted" posters. Holt McCallany wears cropped hair around a handsome pitbull face, a short-sleeved white shirt over an imposing frame and a conservative (for the '70s) tie. He is senior FBI agent Bill Tench, based loosely on the late Robert Ressler, a pioneer of psychological profiling. And he looks like a hammer in search of a nail. But when he stops beside Fincher he's quiet, deferential: "David, can I ask you a question?"

McCallany's co-star Jonathan Groff strides in behind — bounds really, except that implies a lack of elegance. He wears a powder-blue shirt, trim grey trousers and a sunbeam face that suggests this isn't just a job: it's an adventure. He's Holden Ford, also loosely based on a real agent, John Douglas, from whose book the Netflix series finds its inspiration: *Mindhunter: Inside The FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit*. Douglas was on the bleeding edge of investigation: talking to incarcerated serial killers to get insight into their instincts and then help police with live enquiries. These were G-men becoming amateur psychologists.

It was this angle that first intrigued Fincher, a director who has long been fascinated by serial killers but had never seen their psyches explored in this way. "It was the fact that this massive crime-fighting bureaucracy was engaging with this kind of criminal behaviour on the level of, 'Let's understand it,'" he explains. "That was interesting."

The scene about to be shot will in a way encapsulate the thrust of the whole show. Holden is explaining to a local police officer how he intends to question a suspect in the murder of a young girl. He's going to try to get the guy to open up, he's going to try to understand him, he may even seem like he *sympathises* with him. The gist: things are going to get *weird*.

Cameras roll, the exchange plays and at its close the cop turns to Tench, a bit bemused: "All this an FBI thing?" The weary reply comes: "It's *his* thing."

"Cut!" calls Fincher. "Moving on!" There's a pause, from shock. Then laughter, as it dawns upon cast and crew that their director — not exactly known for being shy of repeating takes — is taking the piss. As detail-orientated as any FBI profiler, Fincher is hardly going to rush through a scene as nuanced as this. Walking over to the monitor, he says, "Okay, play that back. Let me see everything that was fucked up about it."



Above: *Seven*, *Zodiac*, and Fincher (right) on set of *Gone Girl*. **Above right:** *MINDHUNTER*'s Holden Ford (Jonathan Groff) and Bill Tench (Holt McCallany). **Here:** And with training chief Shepard (Cotter Smith).



THE LIST OF things that are “fucked up” about *MINDHUNTER* would be quite extensive. It is dealing in the most depraved and violent of human behaviour. Grubbiness is nothing new, of course, for its primary director and executive producer. But Fincher’s return to Netflix — after launching *House Of Cards* back in 2013 — could be an evolution in terms of his storytelling, as at its core it’s more rooted in character than anything he’s done before. (Fincher directed four of the 10 episodes, with the others shot by Dane Tobias Lindholm (*A Hijacking*) and Brits Andrew Douglas (*U Want Me 2 Kill Him?*) and Asif Kapadia (*Senna*). He describes it as being about “the moments between moments”, as opposed to the rat-tat-tat plot machinations of crime procedurals on screens big or small.

“It’s a much more theatrical presentation,” he reflects. “It’s a lot of sitting at a table with a guy in manacles, trying to get him to tell you what was going through his head when he did the most inhuman things to another entity you can possibly imagine.”

The time the show will take to explore behaviour — to get inside the heads of its killers — is one thing that made it different enough from Fincher’s previous sorties into the serial-killer subgenre to warrant engagement. It was Charlize Theron, acting as a producer, who

brought him the book and, after a false start with another writer, introduced him to Joe Penhall, whom she knew from *The Road*. Penhall wrote a pilot and a series bible, which took true cases but fictionalised the investigators to a degree that gave dramatic licence and shape to the show. Of course from *Seven* to *Zodiac* to *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, Fincher has dealt with more than his fair share of successive slaughters. The interest may stem from his youth. His dad was a journalist, his mum a mental-health nurse, and conversations about killers weren’t infrequent at home.

“There were a lot of serial killers in the ’70s,” he remembers. “And we probably talked about most of them. My mom would come down much more on the notion of rehabilitation and my dad would be like, ‘Once you understand what’s really going on, you probably have less empathy than you would going in.’ So that might have been what made *MINDHUNTER* appealing. Then again, whenever I can blame my parents, that’s my default.”

“I THINK PART of the intrigue of the show is watching something that we’re familiar with slowly get built and come together,” says Jonathan Groff. “You really see this spark of an idea in somebody’s brain.”

As much as we now take the idea of psychological profiling for granted, back in the ’70s it was new. In that sense, while *MINDHUNTER* is about murder, it bears some thematic comparison to Fincher’s BAFTA-winning *The Social Network*, in that it is also about invention. Fincher knew Groff from that, in fact, rather than any of his TV work (“I know this is gonna shock you,” says the director, “but I’ve never seen *Glee*”). The actor — who would go on to be a sensation as King George in Broadway smash *Hamilton*, and can currently be heard on inventive divorce-com podcast *36 Questions* — had auditioned to play entrepreneur Sean Parker (a part that eventually went to Justin Timberlake). “He could have acted the shit out of it,” says Fincher. “But he has absolutely no venality.”



It's Groff's purity — an earnest, inherent decency — that makes him right for Ford, who is hard-charging and ambitious, but for the right reasons. "At the beginning of the show he's having an existential crisis," says Groff. "He has an experience in the very first scene of the first episode that rocks his world and makes him think that perhaps all this training he has received from the FBI hasn't done enough for him to be able to do the job in the real world." With his partner, Tench, an initially reluctant accomplice, Ford sets out to interview serial killers. "Who at the time, in the late '70s, weren't even called serial killers yet," Groff explains. "That was a phrase that was created by the Behavioural Science Unit at the FBI."

THE FIRST TWO initials of the unit's name summed up the attitude of many people to the work the BSU did. Holt McCallany's character is caught between the old and new school: he has been shocked and hardened by the brutality and banality of evil, but can see the value in trying new ways to catch killers. It's deft casting. McCallany has had a know-the-face character career built on playing toughs, probably peaking as a dementia-addled boxer in FX's *Lights Out*. But Fincher has known him more than 25 years, having cast him in *Alien 3* and *Fight Club*, and sees the sensitivity and humour beneath the teak veneer — a depth that *MINDHUNTER* will exploit as the show goes on.

"My guy, Tench, doesn't have the same degree of empathy for the killers that Jonathan's character often displays, but he's got a curious mind and he's a good detective," says McCallany. The same applies to the actor himself. His question for Fincher on set was not unusual — he is a relentless inquisitor of his directors. "The serial killer will murder you and desecrate your corpse. But the serial question-asker will bore you to death over many long months of filming."

The "third leg of the tripod", in Fincher's words, is Anna Torv as Dr Wendy Carr, a psychologist who sees a huge opportunity in what Tench and Ford are doing: the chance to really understand what creates killers. "She really wants to put a fire under them to make it a legit study," says Torv, who you may recognise as an FBI agent herself, albeit investigating the paranormal in *Fringe*. For *MINDHUNTER* Torv read extensively and "kind of went down the rabbit hole — everything's so accessible on the internet", to the point where she had to consciously pull back, because the horrific nature of the crimes left her feeling "vulnerable". Still, she had to try to see the material through the eyes of her character, who has an enormous amount of empathy. "Because you look back at the history," says Torv, "and not one of [the killers] had a really beautiful childhood and then decided they were gonna go out and bludgeon someone to death."

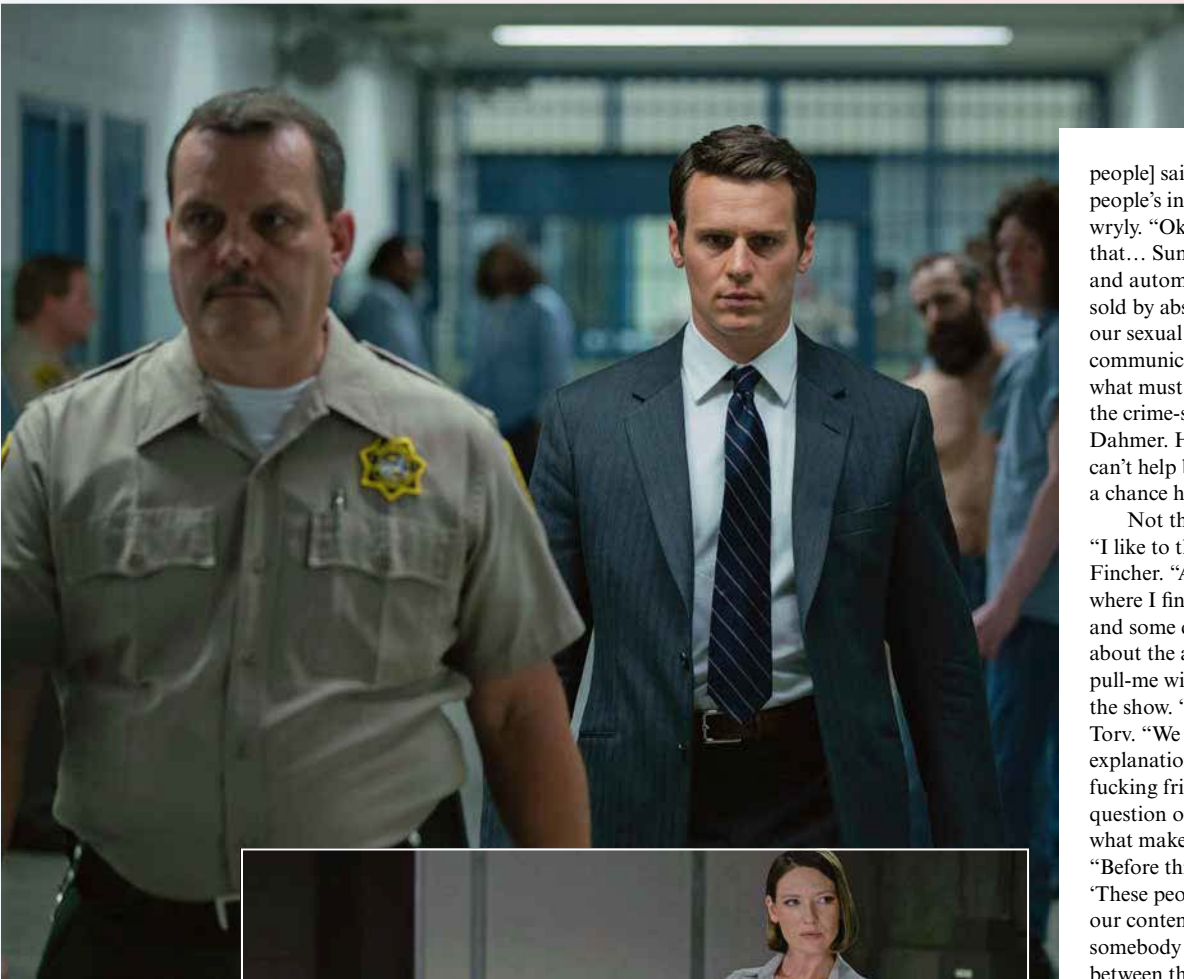
The cast have clearly been chewing over questions of morality — the nature of evil; the possibility of reformation, if not redemption. "The thing that really struck me the most is that it's so easy to write people off as good or evil," says Groff (who Fincher describes, not inaccurately, as "the



Top: Ford and Tench get to grips with Behavioural Science techniques. **Above:** Serial murderer Edmund Kemper (Cameron Britton) gets a little close for comfort with Ford.

sweetest man who ever lived"). "But after spending almost a year in Pittsburgh sitting and listening to these people's stories, you just get involved in the complexity of all of it."

McCallany, perhaps in keeping with his character, seems less ambiguous about the potential rehabilitation of these people — though it's striking how no-one involved in the show seems completely certain in their views. "I was at [FBI Academy] Quantico and I met some of the guys that are currently in the Behavioural Science Unit, what they now call the Behavioural Analysis Unit," he recalls. "If you ask the guys in law enforcement [about rehabilitation], the analogy they often give is, 'Imagine you're baking a cake. The cake has eggs and it has flour and milk and sugar and a lot of perfectly normal ingredients. But imagine just before you put the cake in the oven some motor oil spilled into the batter. Well, when that cake comes out of the oven, is it possible now to remove the motor oil? It's not.' And that's what they think."



THERE MAY BE no cure, but perhaps there can be prevention. That's part of what drove the work of Douglas and Ressler. Visiting Quantico, Fincher walked down into a basement and came face-to-face with a life-size mannequin of Hannibal Lecter: the ultimate serial-killer icon. "*The Silence Of The Lambs* was a huge recruitment tool," says the director, who, when asked by his FBI guides what he wanted to do with *MINDHUNTER*, told them he wanted to strip away the super-villainy of serial killers.

"I feel like Dennis Rader ['The BTK Killer'] is a lot of things, Gary Ridgway ['The Green River Killer'] is a lot of things, Richard Ramirez ['The Night Stalker'] is a lot of things," he says. "But they're not gourmands. We want to show these people as they really are, which is quite sad and human. Even though the aspect of them that they're keeping hidden is this intensely subhuman part."

It's an attitude you might not expect from the man who once put Gwyneth Paltrow's head in a box. But there's empathy here. Recalls Fincher: "Jeffrey Dahmer [cannibal, necrophiliac and murderer of 17

people] said, 'I'm sexually aroused by seeing people's insides.'" He pauses, before adding wryly. "Okay, well, there's not a lot of clubs for that... Suntan lotion and beer and bubblegum and automobiles are sold by cleavage, they're sold by abs — there's this commingling of our sexual impulse in almost every kind of communication. If that doesn't work for you, what must the world be like? I mean, I've seen the crime-scene photographs from Jeffrey Dahmer. He was a subhuman. And yet you can't help but listen to him and go, 'Was there a chance had we gotten there earlier?'"

Not that the empathy extends eternally. "I like to think of myself as a liberal," says Fincher. "And yet there are definitely moments where I find myself going, 'Give me a backhoe and some quicklime and let's stop worrying about the appeals process.'" It's this push-me, pull-me within the makers which will power the show. "We need to find justification," says Torv. "We want there to be a reasonable explanation, because if there isn't then that's fucking frightening. I think that's part of the question of the show." Fincher is interested in what makes us tick — and what makes us sick. "Before this time at the FBI the attitude was 'These people are rabid dogs, they're beneath our contempt.' I thought it was interesting that somebody said, 'Maybe, but the difference between them and rabid dogs is you can talk to them.'"

Douglas, in his book, reaches a perhaps surprising conclusion for someone who spent so much time talking to murderers and has seen such horror: "I truly believe that along with more money and police and prisons, what we most need more of is love. This is not being simplistic; it's at the very heart of the issue."

Seeing killers as broken people, rather than faceless monsters, was part of what the FBI learned to do, in a bid to stop more killing. What creates killers, how can it be stopped, what potential evils do we have inside us? *MINDHUNTER* is asking difficult questions. "It is also entirely salacious!" says Fincher. "Let's not kid ourselves. But hopefully we're going to be dealing with the things that make us similar as opposed to the things that separate us."

It's not that everyone is capable of great evil, of course — at least not on the scale of the psychosexual sadists in *MINDHUNTER*. But there's great fascination in exploring the darkness in people's hearts. And a career in it, too. Back in Pittsburgh — on a break from shooting outside a high-rise apartment block — the director is showing *Empire* how his new camera works and we're nodding and smiling and pretending to understand, when a resident comes over to say she's a fan. Fincher smiles. "It's always nice to know there are perverts out there!" She laughs. "We keep you in business!"

"That's true," says Fincher. "Without perverts I'd be nothing." ●

Top: Ford walks the prison halls. **Above:** Tench is joined by Dr Wendy Carr (Anna Torv), *MINDHUNTER*'s "third leg" according to Fincher.

MINDHUNTER IS ON NETFLIX FROM 13 OCTOBER





MAKING A MURDER



An all-star cast. 65mm cameras. The biggest moustache in the world. Kenneth Branagh is throwing everything at his adaptation of Agatha Christie's *Murder On The Orient Express*. But can he make the old seem new?



WORDS IAN FREER



Clockwise from left: Josh Gad as Hector MacQueen; Kenneth Branagh framing Leslie Odom Jr (Dr Arbutnot) and Michelle Pfeiffer (Caroline Hubbard); Mary Debenham (Daisy Ridley), Hildegard Schmidt (Olivia Colman) and Princess Dragomiroff (Judi Dench); Arbutnot takes aim; Johnny Depp as Edward Ratchett.



W

When you think Agatha Christie, what comes to mind? Your grandparents' bookshelf? Bad local 'theatre'? Sunday nights on ABC in the 1980s? If so, director-producer-star Kenneth Branagh wants to throw your preconceptions on the tracks. *Murder On The Orient Express*, based on Christie's landmark 1934 whodunnit, sees Belgian detective Hercule Poirot (Branagh) interrogate 13 suspects following the murder of shady American businessman Samuel Edward Ratchett (Johnny Depp) aboard the luxurious train. It's a story as old as the Alps — Sidney Lumet delivered an okay-ish all-star version in

1974 — but Branagh is shooting for a vision that is big and bold, feeling both classic and contemporary. Like Poirot minus his newly titanic 'tache, *Empire* grills Branagh and the cast of 2017 to solve a mystery: how do you adapt an 83-year-old page-turner for the IMAX crowd?

THE DETECTIVE

Kenneth Branagh (Hercule Poirot/director):

Having played Wallander, I was so interested to play a detective who, by contrast, was happy. His association with violent crime takes its toll, but Poirot has an absolute determination to leave that world any time he can, to thrive in his delight in cake or travel. I get the feeling that if he didn't have to solve another crime in his life, he'd be overjoyed.

Willem Dafoe (furtive academic Gerhard

Hardman): As Poirot, Ken drives the investigation. And as director, Ken drives the shoot. So the parallel is very close.

Penélope Cruz (Spanish missionary Pilar Estravados): To see him go from fiction to reality back and forth, a thousand times in one day, it's mindblowing to watch. He was

100 per cent there for you as Poirot, 100 per cent there for you as your director.

Branagh: I am nothing like Poirot. I am the kind of person who never guesses the murderer unless they tell me. I am sure *Empire* readers were well ahead of me with *The Usual Suspects*: "He read it all on the fucking board!" I remember those reveal moments as really pleasurable, but I am never quicker than the filmmakers.

THE MURDER

Branagh: At the centre of the story, you needed someone who you might believe someone would stoop to murder. So Johnny Depp as Edward Ratchett becomes a helpful thing in the narrative — a star personality. This character is someone who really creates a lot of space around him. He takes up a lot of oxygen.

Josh Gad (private secretary Hector MacQueen): MacQueen and Ratchett's butler Masterman [Derek Jacobi] see things that are sometimes questionable and are protectors of his image. There's a sense that everybody on this train knows more than they're letting on.



Cruz: The movie is very entertaining but there are layers of real pain for these characters. Pilar is a missionary who is very damaged from something that happened in her past. She lives with guilt, but does it make her a killer? The film poses the idea: is revenge ever justified? When movies are good, they make you ask yourself interesting questions.

THE SUSPECTS

Gad: In 1934, the train would have had a very specific, Euro-centric feel to it. But Ken threw all that away and so in our version there is more than that. There are people of different colours, different religions.

Branagh: I cast step-by-step, individual by individual, and then it added up to something in the end. I started with the princess. I knew I wanted Judi to do that.

Judi Dench (imperious grande dame Princess Natalia Dragomiroff): Princess Dragomiroff has two very, very nice dogs.

Gad: When I first met Judi, I said, "Forget Dame Judi Dench — it's DAMN Judi Dench."

Branagh: So you start with her and think, "I need

someone who could share the screen with Dame Judi Dench." Olivia Colman has been on such a rich vein of form across the past four or five years. I had an instinct that was a great pairing. I just went on like that.

Michelle Pfeiffer (brash widow Caroline Hubbard): Caroline is travelling alone and is very curious, maybe a little bit too curious. The rumour is she is hunting for a husband. Lauren Bacall played her in the 1974 version. I asked Ken if he thought watching it would be helpful. He said he would rather we didn't.

Daisy Ridley (governess Mary Debenham): Mary is travelling to Baghdad. Mary Debenham is such a good name. It's hilarious. I was on holiday last summer and somebody asked me if I was Daisy Ridley and I said, "No," and had to quickly think of a name. So I said, "Linda Debenham." I had literally just got the role.

Leslie Odom Jr (honourable combat veteran Dr Arbutnot): My character is a World War I veteran, and let's just say that love is keeping him on the train.

Gad: I think there are multiple ideas in this film that are absolutely relevant to what we are witnessing today. With Willem Dafoe's character, you get the idea of prejudice that comes with the outsider. The rise of nationalism. This sense of

pride in country. The rise of fascism is happening at that time and I think we unfortunately see reflections in the past happening again in the present. We were very cognisant of that because, while we were shooting, Brexit happened, Trump was elected. It becomes a part of the fabric of the story that you are telling.

Dafoe: My guy is an Austrian professor of engineering, going to Turin to give a paper about the military uses of Bakelite. He is wound pretty tight. If I was watching this movie, I would suspect him pretty early.

Olivia Colman (Dragomiroff's maid Hildegarde Schmidt): My husband didn't know who did it. I ruined it for him.

THE TRAIN

Branagh: I knew I wanted to give it some scope. When I got involved, I said, "Let's not have a snow drift, let's have an avalanche. Let's maroon them in this place." The murderer is not getting away. We wanted to make the wide-open spaces intimidating, so you understand there is a primitive desire to stay in a warm space. Which turns out to be a dangerous space. ➤

Ridley: There was a full train built on scaffolding for the avalanche, which was *uh-maze-ing*.

Branagh: A real train up on a real viaduct with all these actors getting on helped create a tingle quality. I was shooting with the last four 65mm Panavision cameras in the world, to take people on a journey in the Golden Age of travel. The depth of colour and the quality of the definition of the image is so extraordinary. I had just been on *Dunkirk* [playing a navy commander], had done it before myself [1996's *Hamlet*] and I knew it made cinema an event. So much of our crime drama is on television and I wanted this to feel different.

Tom Bateman (railway director Monsieur Bouc): There was a fully moving, 22-ton locomotive, plus tender and four carriages, that went along a mile of track laid down at Longcross Studios. The leafy lanes of Surrey became the former Yugoslavia — that was quite amazing. If you've ever tried to ply people with Champagne on a moving train, it's not easy.

Branagh: For the scenery outside the windows, we went to New Zealand and Switzerland with a second unit and shot hours of footage. This was then digitally stitched together and played on [2,500] LED screens wrapped around each carriage. Hydraulics and air bellows beneath the carriages gave the illusion of movement.

Gad: It was almost too real. You are on a train that has the motion. You have these moving images surrounding you. At first it is a very strange sensation. But also a really incredible asset.

Derek Jacobi (impeccable butler Masterman): The first time they did the images going by, it was a bit vomit-making.

Branagh: There was a moment when we were filming where there was a little break but the screens were still running. I went down to one end of the train just to see the scenery passing like you would on a real train. It was funny to find myself doing that but I wasn't the only one. There was an immersive thing immediately.

Gad: There was a very big resolve on Ken's part not to confine the action to the train. I think part of what he loves about the story is the claustrophobia. But some of the vista shots we were shooting have a David Lean quality. Nobody does this kind of filmmaking anymore — taking the time to exquisitely frame a shot. There is a sense that Kenneth will take the old and make it new again. It doesn't feel dusty.

Branagh: A film that influenced me is Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence*. I finished that film and was awestruck by the sense that I had been in 19th-century New York, that I knew the art, smelled the flowers, felt the linen tableclothes. I also looked at John Ford's *The Searchers*. I was always stripping things away, clearing things out. You'll probably find less clutter in our Orient Express than on the real one.

Gad: I have just taken the ride on the actual Orient Express. It has a piano. The food is all Michelin-rated. There is a call button. Each cabin has a butler. You do queue for the loo but you never have to wait in line. The only problem is there are no showers so you have to come prepared.



Clockwise from left: Swiss rolling in the mountains — “Let’s have an avalanche, let’s maroon people in this place”; Tom Bateman as M Bouc; Pilar Estravados (Penélope Cruz) gets ready to board; Derek Jacobi as Masterman; The too-curious Mrs Hubbard.

THE MOUSTACHE

Branagh: We knew the moustache would be a thing because it was a thing for Christie. She really does have every character respond to it. There are 15 easy-to-find quotes about how she regards the moustache, which is usually “immense”, “magnificent” or “majestic”. It is the one thing Christie and her husband found a little bit disappointing about the ’74 version.

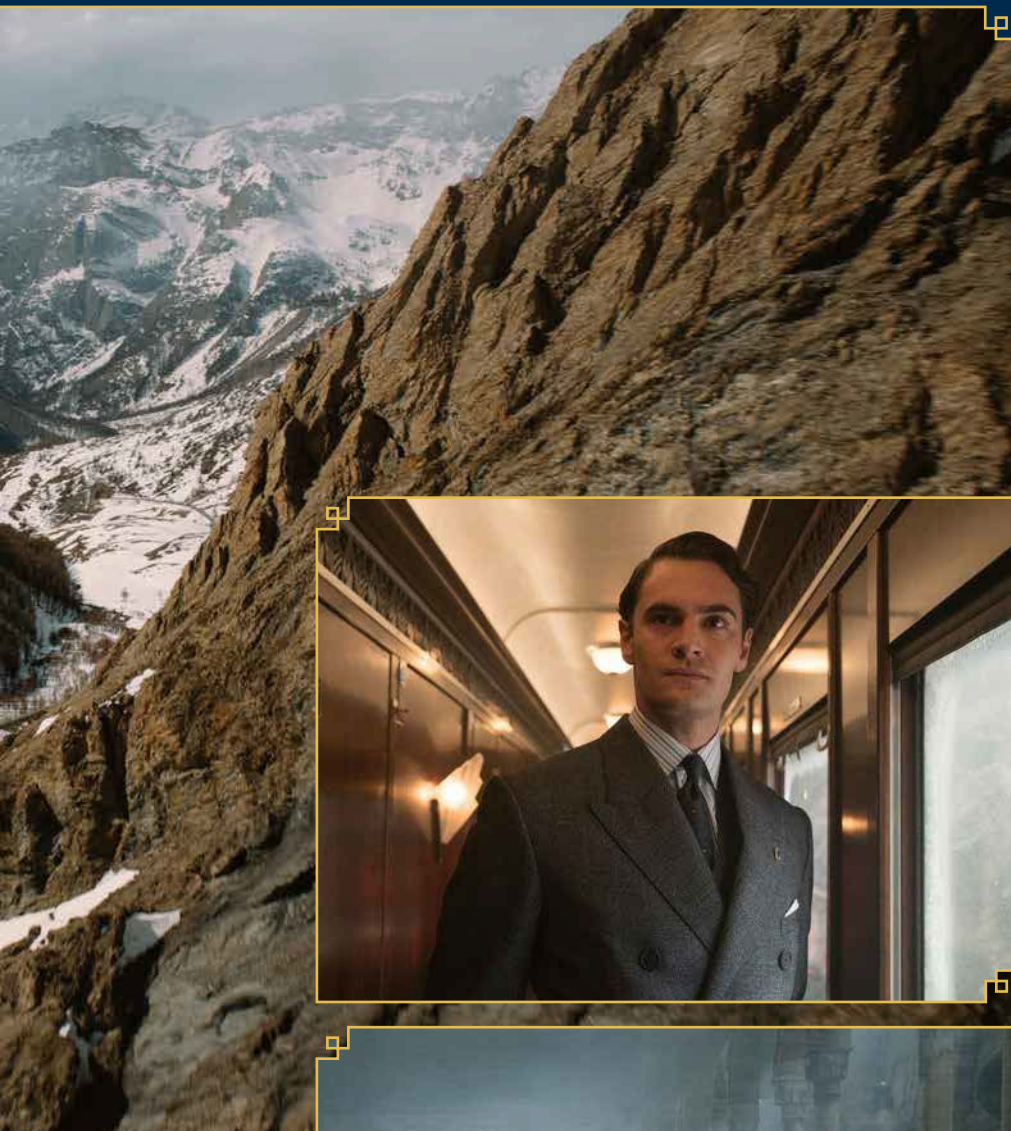
Colman: The Poirot we grew up with — David Suchet — had a tiny, thin, black moustache. Now all I see is Ken. Piercing blue eyes and massive ‘tache — that is the only Poirot for me.

Lucy Boynton (mysterious noblewoman Countess Andrenyi): We saw it on the mannequin heads in the make-up truck and it was pretty substantial. And then you see it on Ken’s face and it is even more impactful.

Pfeiffer: It was a little distracting in the beginning. I went, “Whoa! Okay! That’s an effect!” But you forget about it. He manages to make it completely believable and very sexy.

Branagh: Poirot can hide behind the moustache. But also, when people mock it or ridicule it or dismiss it, they underestimate him and therefore his job as a detective becomes simpler.





Marwan Kenzari (train conductor Pierre Michel):

If Ken laughed in the scene, you would see him trying to stop himself ruining the beautiful moustache. So that became very funny, trying to find out how to make him laugh.

Cruz: I just had to laugh for 10 minutes at the beginning of the day. When he arrived I was like, “Waaaaah!” He told me he has a trailer just for his moustache. Every day I saw him was so funny. First the moustache walked in, then him.

THE DOWNTIME

Dench: What was very extraordinary is that we were all together. It’s not like a film where you are all in different bits.

Colman: The train was the green room. We only got off when they made us get off.

Pfeiffer: Josh Gad is hilarious. He’d start doing Penélope Cruz impersonations. Then he would start in on Javier [Bardem, Cruz’s husband].

Gad: It was like camp. Everybody had this sense of playfulness. I remember Ken playing Shakespeare trivia with us. Of course, Derek and Judi killed everybody. I felt so incompetent because they can quote Shakespeare. But I can quote *The Goonies*. Ken, Derek and Judi don’t know Sloth’s dialogue: “SLOTH LOVES CHUNK!”

Ridley: I learnt backgammon. Derek did his crossword every day. He is really good at crosswords.

Cruz: I showed the entire cast how to play Werewolves. I have a team in Madrid and a team in LA where our leader is Leonardo DiCaprio. You have to give a speech about how you are *not* one of the wolves in a village that is killing everyone else at night. You have to lie and manipulate and save yourself. I think it was a good exercise for what was happening on the set.

Boynton: There was one final game of Werewolves where, weirdly enough, J.J. Abrams was there. Josh orchestrated this final grilling of Daisy.

Gad: My hounding of Daisy started with the reveal of *The Last Jedi* title while we were shooting. I just thought it would be funny to pester her. On social media, everybody has got questions. I thought I would take it to the next level. I made her life a living hell. It then just became a fun game getting all those people involved. It was such an ensemble piece — I hope we all get to do another project together.

Jacobi: I think we should do all the Agatha Christies. A rep company.

Branagh: Part of the joy was working with a big company like this. The credits will be interesting; there is a theory that the killer is always the sixth name in the credits. That sounds very plausible. I’m thinking of messing with our credits — I’ll have to talk to Fox legal, or we’ll be rumbled. ●

MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS IS IN CINEMAS
FROM 9 NOVEMBER



For a brief period

in the 1980s,

Corey Feldman and Corey Haim *were* the 1980s.

TRUE B

Then

it

all

went

wrong.



WORDS ADAM SMITH

then got lost in the shadows

took over Hollywood,

OMNANCE

Empire chronicles how two kids

A

tantalisng hidden history of Hollywood in the 1970s and '80s no doubt resides on long-discarded answerphone tapes: tiny C30s lodged in attics, bearing on their thin, magnetic strips ghostly fragments of Hollywood brouhahas long past.

"Steven, pick up. I just saw the shark footage from yesterday. We've really got a problem..."

"Call me as soon as you get this. Coppola's gone goddamn rogue in the Philippines, and there's talk of a hurricane. A fucking hurricane. John. I think we have to get someone down there."

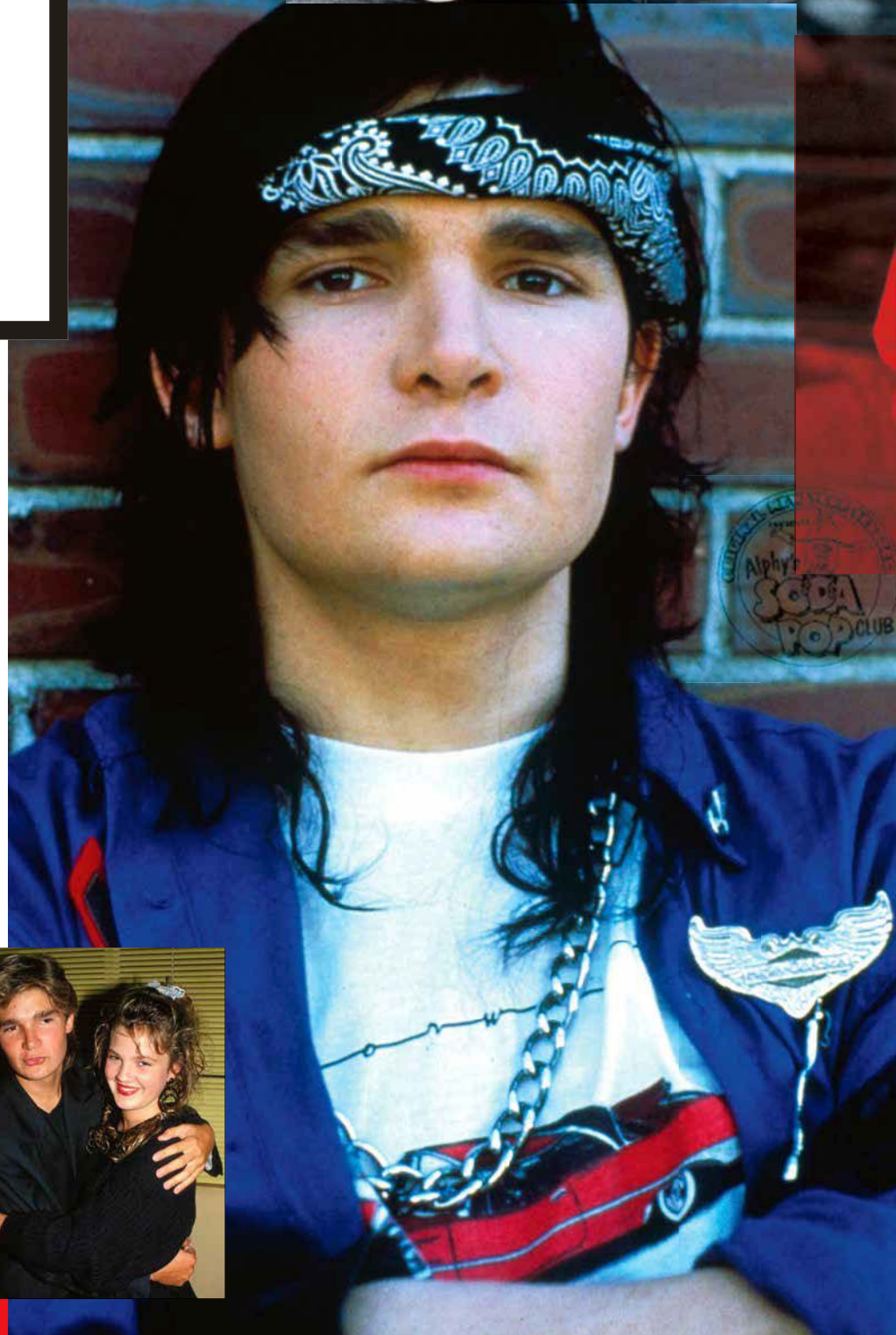
Or then there's this one: "Hey, man. It's Corey. Corey Haim. Listen, I'm really excited 'cause we're going to be working together on *The Lost Boys*. That's really cool. And we have the same name, so we're probably going to end up being really good friends. Why don't we plan a time to get together, man? Maybe we could go to the beach, throw a football around? Call me."

"Sounds like a nice guy," thought Feldman, a Hollywood veteran at all of 14 years old with hits including *Stand By Me* and *The Goonies* behind him, after he pressed play. "Maybe we'll get on."

And so, on a grey SoCal afternoon in 1986, Corey Haim and Corey Feldman met for the first time on a deserted beach called Paradise Cove in Malibu. The former revealed that his favourite number was 222; the latter replied that his was 22. It was the start of a friendship that would endure for 24 years, until Haim's death, aged 38, in 2010.

"We became fast friends, obviously," Feldman tells *Empire*. "We had so much in common at that point. We were the same age, same height, both Jewish, both girl-crazy. And we both had screwed-up families. His was screwed-up in a different way. But we both understood each other."

Those who knew and worked with them have nothing but happy memories. But over the years it would sometimes prove a very rough ride indeed. And fittingly, given how far they strayed off the path over the years, it all began with *The Lost Boys*.





The original pitch

was simple: "What if Peter Pan never grew up because he was a vampire?" It was screenwriters James Jeremias and Janice Fisher who hit on the idea of spinning J.M. Barrie's fairy tale into a kid-friendly horror movie, which was quickly picked up by Warner Bros. "In our screenplay the main characters were basically John and Michael and the mother was Wendy," remembers Jeremias. "They were 12 and eight, and we purposefully picked [those ages] because we wanted it before sex rears its ugly little head."

When director Joel Schumacher met Warner's executive vice-president Mark Canton in 1986 to discuss the project, he was unconvinced, spluttering, "Are you actually offering me a *kids' vampire movie*?" He only agreed to read the script after some persuasion and a few more drinks. "It was really 'Goonies Go Vampire,'" Schumacher says now. But as he pondered the story, he began to envision a different take on the material. "I remember thinking, 'Well, I can make it teenagers,'" he says. "The Frog brothers could be little Rambos. And why can't Star be a sexy girl?"

Casting began. Or rather, it had already begun — Corey Feldman had been approached to play young vampire-hunter Edgar Frog when Richard Donner, the man who made the actual *The Goonies*, was in talks to direct. Schumacher asked Feldman to come in and read for the role, and was immediately enthused. "Corey had been in *Goonies* and done *Stand By Me*, and I was already crazy about him as a young actor," he says. "I thought he was great and very versatile." He gave Feldman instructions to watch Schwarzenegger and Stallone movies and gave him one note: "Can you maybe butch it up a little bit?"

As for the role of Sam Emerson, one of the movie's two lead characters, Schumacher was advised by a manager friend to check out

Corey Haim's performance in tiny Canadian indie *Lucas*. "He was so charming and good in it," remembers Schumacher. "I once heard Ed Zwick say that there are some actors that seem to carry their own light with them when they walk in a room and it's true. Corey was like that."

In fact, the Coreys had been circling each other for a while, having almost been brought together a year earlier for *Stand By Me*. Haim had read for, and been offered, the role of Chris Chambers, eventually played by River Phoenix, but had accepted the lead role in *Lucas* only hours earlier. He never regretted it: his performance in the high-school drama gained raves from critics, Roger Ebert writing, "If he can continue to act this well, he will never become a half-forgotten child star, but will continue to grow into an important actor. He is that good."

Shooting in Santa Cruz, California, and on the Warner lot, Haim and Feldman didn't share a huge number of scenes. But when the movie came out in July 1987 and proved a massive hit (pipped to the number-one spot only by *The Living Daylights*), the pairing of these two kids named Corey proved a big talking point. Fans began to snap photos of them whenever they ventured out in public. And with then-mighty teen magazines *16* and *Tiger Beat* fanning the flames, soon the pair were receiving 2,000 fan letters a week. Postcards, love letters, invitations to junior prom and giant boxes of

polyurethane sushi, mailed with incandescent affection by 12-year-old Japanese schoolgirls, were all physical testament to their sudden, trans-planetary appeal.

"When we met on *Lost Boys*, it was the beginning of some happy days," remembers Feldman, who fought to be legally emancipated from his parents in 1987, alleging physical and mental abuse (claims his mother has denied). "I realised my parents were so screwed up that I wasn't going to have any semblance of normality if I stayed on this course."

However, in Hollywood normality is a relative concept. A small amuse-bouche of the brewing weirdness was served up when Feldman, he says, was informed that his agent had arranged a date for him and Drew Barrymore. "Isn't she a bit young for me?" the perplexed Feldman, 14 at the time, remembers asking. Barrymore was 10.

Individually, Haim and Feldman were becoming household names. But together, the entity known as The Two Coreys was becoming an untameable beast with a demented mind of its own.

Hollywood, then in

the midst of a teen golden age, crawled with youthful talent. And Ground Zero for the Clearasil crowd (including Barrymore and Sean Astin) was LA's Alphy's Soda Pop Club. According to writer and artist Jennifer Juniper Stratford, who was a regular attendee, it was a "disco designed for kids in 'the industry'... With a clientele aged 16 and under, the club guaranteed a dance floor full of the hottest teen stars as well as all the free soda you could drink. It was the ultimate teenage wonderland."

The Coreys became lauded regulars, infamously hosting one party during which someone dived from the 11th floor into an air-bag while captive tigers were held on leashes below. And soda, it seems, wasn't the only thing on tap.

"Everyone was on drugs," Haim told Stratford in a *Vice* interview in 2012. "I was

Clockwise from bottom left: Corey Feldman with Drew Barrymore in 1987; Feldman in *Dream A Little Dream* and, inset, the logo for infamous teen club Alphy's Soda Pop Club; *Teen Beat* can't get enough Corey in 1989; *License To Drive*'s poster...; ... and Feldman and Corey Haim with Heather Graham in the film; Haim in *Blown Away*; The Coreys with Jamison Newlander in *The Lost Boys*.

COREY-OGRAPHY

A COMPLETE RUN-DOWN OF THE MOVIES
HAIM AND FELDMAN MADE TOGETHER

The Lost Boys (1987)

Joel Schumacher's vampire flick established itself as an enduring '80s cultural artefact and one of the most appealing horror-comedies of all time.

License To Drive (1988)

Acceptable if under-torqued John

Hughes clone, with Haim as the unlicensed motorist and Feldman as his buddy. Cinematography by the great Bruce Surtees (*Dirty Harry*).

Dream A Little Dream (1989)

Vice-versa movie in which Feldman has his soul knocked out of his body. Features the best supporting cast the Coreys ever had, including Piper Laurie and Harry Dean Stanton.

Blown Away (1992)

DTV erotic thriller in which the Coreys form two points of a love triangle with Haim's real-life girlfriend Nicole Eggert. Notable mainly for excessive exposure of Haim's hams.

National Lampoon's Last Resort (1994)

Barely watchable mess has the pair relocating from Detroit to a tropical island where uninspired hijinks commence. Even Zelda 'Poltergeist' Rubinstein can't save this.

Dream A Little Dream 2 (1995)

Any charm the original had has long evaporated in this insipid retread involving 'magical sunglasses'.

Busted (1997)

"Feldman was hurling out orders while two big-breasted bimbos massaged him," Haim recalled of Feldman's directorial debut, a mirthless *Police Academy* knock-off.

Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star (2003)

There was a certain inevitability to the duo turning up in David Spade's cameo-crammed comedy. Also features Todd Bridges, Willie Aames and Gary Coleman.

Lost Boys: The Tribe (2008)

The last time the pair would appear, briefly, in a movie together was in this ill-judged re-vamp of the classic that started it all. Haim's contribution was relegated to a post-credits outtake.



on drugs, Feldman was on drugs. At the end of it, we were 16 or 17 years old! *Lost Boys* was done, and we were going to other clubs and doing drugs. So at that time, a lot of people were getting messed up."

In fact, both teenagers had become acquainted with narcotics well before they started attending Alphy's. Corey Haim smoked his first joint while filming *The Lost Boys*, while Corey Feldman tried cocaine around the same time. Schumacher had been observing the young stars from a distance, his pride tinged with concern, heightened when Feldman arrived on set unable to work. As he recalls now: "I thought, 'Hey, give a couple of kids a lot of money and limos and girlfriends and blah, blah, blah... Well, maybe they'll come out the other end of it.'"

Eager to monetise the duo's unexpected heat, 20th Century Fox put next Corey project *License To Drive* into production within months, a buddy comedy directed by director Greg Beeman. "John Hughes was the king at the time, and every studio was looking for teen comedies," Beeman recalls. "I remember being on set thinking how young everyone was. Corey Haim didn't even *have* a driver's licence. Despite Feldman, in particular, having been in the business for years, they just seemed to me to be a pair of kids."

Between them, the Coreys experimented with joints, acid, cocaine, heroin, mushrooms, Quaaludes and prescription pills. And over the years, details of their off-set misdemeanours filled tabloid covers and TV exposés: selling a personal CD collection on street corners for drugs (Feldman), being arrested and charged for threatening his business manager with a BB gun (Haim), being arrested and charged for possession of heroin (Feldman), launching a teen drug line (1-800-COREY) but being loaded while giving advice (Haim).

Clockwise from main:

Joel Schumacher with his young *Lost Boys* cast; The woeful *National Lampoon's Last Resort*; Feldman graces the cover of *Splice* in May 1988; The pair at the Fourth Annual American Cinematheque Awards honouring Steven Spielberg on 1 April, 1989; Gossip rag coverage of the hijinx at Alphy's Soda Pop Club; Frames from a TV ad urging teens to call their fan line.



“When Corey was sober, we had some of the funniest moments... When he was at the top of his game he was so brilliant.”

COREY FELDMAN



There were an endless string of wild days and wilder nights. But in the early 1990s, facing financial ruin, Feldman finally got sober, with the help of Richard Donner, who had kept an eye on his protégé ever since the *Goonies* days and now not only paid for legal fees but put him in touch with a drug counsellor.

“I have never met a better man in this industry,” says Feldman, who declined to comment to *Empire* on his one-time drug problems. “He was a father figure, someone I could go to, not just for money but emotional support. If I didn’t have Richard Donner, if I didn’t have some of these older people in my life who showed me how to do things for myself, who knows where I’d be.”

For Haim, though, always tortured by the distant hoots and screams of a better party, somewhere out there in the night, things would never be so clear-cut.

By the early ‘90s, Haim and Feldman were pure gold to the supermarket tabloids but radioactive to the major studios. 1992’s glossy DTV sex thriller *Blown Away* was another attempt to resurrect the success they had

enjoyed as a double act on *The Lost Boys*. For director Brenton Spencer, a veteran TV director of photography, it would prove a trial by fire. “It was a gong show,” he says. “Even though I had done a lot of work by then, it was still like being on a wild horse.”

Spencer was not aware of drugs being present during filming, though he says that “alcohol was needed at times, to fortify”. Nevertheless, the shoot was beset by chaos from the get-go. While Feldman had by now completed rehab, Haim was still a mess, being admitted to hospital on more than one occasion. But in the midst of the belaboured production, what impressed itself on Spencer was the relationship between Haim and his friend. “You know, [they] went from making \$800,000 a movie to making \$50,000. It was such a fall,” he says. “But there was a great simpatico between the two of them. There were so many takers in Corey Haim’s life, except for Corey Feldman. Corey understood him. And Corey did not take from him.”

But by the time Haim was cast solo in 1994’s *The Club*, again directed by Spencer, he had become a straight liability, making frequent hospital visits within the first week.

“It wasn’t completed with Corey,” sighs the director, who was forced to fire Haim (the role was ultimately played by J.H. Wyman). “I’d go and wait for him in the lobby at Outpatients. He was at a real low then, you could see that.”

The pair’s demise as a marketable duo seemed pretty much sealed. *National Lampoon’s Last Resort* (1994) was an aptly titled farrago. Feldman took a VHS tape of it to Haim in rehab. “Dude, this movie sucks,” an appalled Haim told his friend. “Yeah, but we thought it was great. That’s what drugs do to you,” Feldman responded. But if Feldman had Haim’s drug habit to blame for *Last Resort*, a similar excuse was not available to him for *Busted* (1997), a Feldman-directed *Police Academy* rip-off that marked the final time they would share a big screen.

By the end of 1997, Haim, finally apparently admitting defeat, returned to live in Canada with his mother and filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Sporadic appearances either in forgettable DTV movies or in the pages of gossip rags continued, until 2007 TV reality show *The Two Coreys*

caused a tidal wave of publicity. In the first episode of Season 2, titled ‘Showdown’, the pair argued heatedly in a diner, claiming that they had both been abused by men at Hollywood parties as children. “If you can’t trust your own parents or the people your parents hire to look after you, who can you trust?” says Feldman of those early days.

Despite the dark revelations, *The Two Coreys* was an endearing showcase of the duo’s unique bond. “When he was sober, we had some of the funniest moments ever created between the two of us, even funnier than some of the films we did,” Feldman says of shooting it. “When he was at the top of his game he was so witty and so brilliant.” Off the back of it, Haim was given a cameo in *Crank: High Voltage*, while he and Feldman were reported to be prepping a sequel to *License To Drive* titled *License To Fly*.

But on 10 March 2010, paramedics were called to the Oakwood Apartments where Haim was then living, looking after his mother. He was pronounced dead in the early hours at Providence Saint Joseph Medical Center. The cause of death was later determined to be pneumonia; although there were traces of eight legal drugs in his system, the coroner’s office ruled that they were not a factor.

“I’m responsible, without realising it, for what were the best of times, and the worst of times,” muses Schumacher, 30 years after *The Lost Boys* launched the Coreys upon an unsuspecting planet. “They became fast friends, immediately. They were going up to Michael Jackson’s house and hanging together and doing everything together. I’ve seen Corey Feldman many times since and I’m so proud of him that he really pulled himself together. He’s been through a lot.”

Feldman himself still misses his old friend every day. “For all intents and purposes we really were brothers,” he says. “We both dealt with some of the same demons, both the demons we brought onto ourselves, and more importantly the demons that were pushed onto us.”

But then, that always was the grim secret of Hollywood, that neon-flecked boardwalk by the sea.

All the damn vampires. ●





REBEL

DARREN ARONOFSKY IS HOLLYWOOD'S MOST UNCOMPROMISING AUTEUR.
BUT NOTHING YOU'VE SEEN FROM HIM BEFORE CAN PREPARE YOU FOR
MOTHER!, A SURREALIST PRESSURE-COOKER OF A MOVIE

WORDS IAN NATHAN ILLUSTRATION JACEY

HEART

CONCEPTION

Growing up in Manhattan Beach, Darren Aronofsky was obsessed with the Cyclone. Something about the intensity of Coney Island's famous wooden rollercoaster spoke to the embryonic director: the slow, ratcheted upward climb; the freefalling and switchbacks; the chorus of screams. It was terror by design. He would ride it every summer. And watch other riders get off with jelly legs and huge grins.

Zoom forward 30 years and Aronofsky is a filmmaker notorious for taking studio movies with big, beautiful stars to violent and hallucinatory extremes. His \$60,000 black-and-white debut, *Pi*, depicted a paranoid number theorist who thinks he's discovered a code sent by God. His second, a devastating adaptation of Hubert Selby Jr's heroin-seeped tragedy *Requiem For A Dream*, descended into a vortex of sexual degradation and amputation.

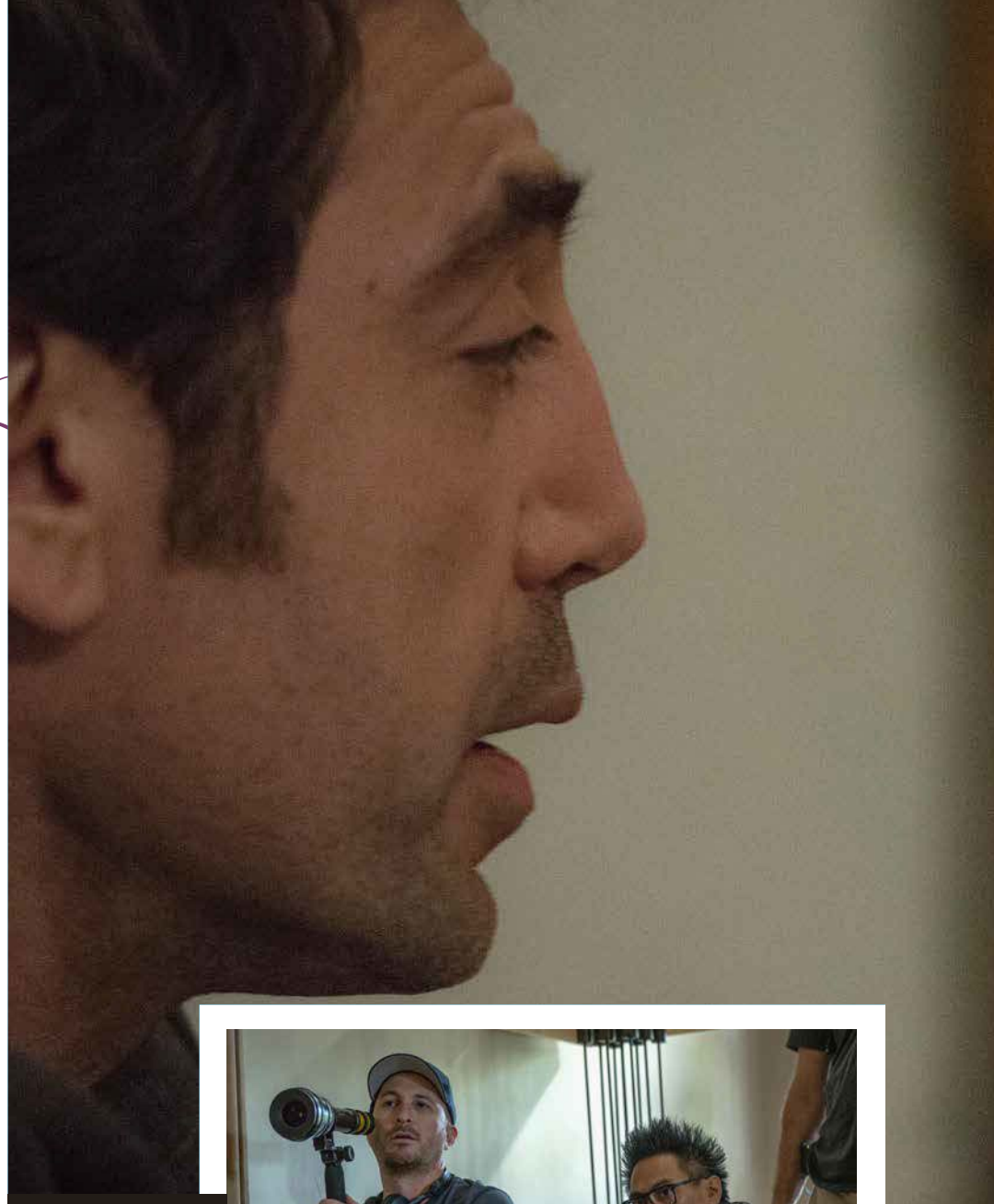
For the smash-hit, Oscar-winning *Black Swan*, he transformed the prim glissade of professional ballet into a psychosexual burlesque, in which Natalie Portman's hyper-neurotic ballerina also played her own diabolic doppelgänger. The act of creation is always a short stop from madness. In *The Wrestler*, arguably Aronofsky's most mainstream film, Mickey Rourke's fading fighter staple-guns his own forehead.

"I really don't want to be McDonald's, where people are entertained and that is that," the 48-year-old laughs. "I want people to talk about my films."

His latest, *mother!* (the eccentric styling used is all grist to the mystery), is certain to be endlessly pored over. It is surely the apotheosis of his bedevilmings; his most ambitious and confounding exercise in cinematic extremity. And it torments one of Hollywood's biggest stars.

In the beginning, however, was a bad case of writer's block. Well, writer's itch. Aronofsky was deep into the script for, of all things, a kids' movie. "Something very personal," he says of the project, which contained elements of his own comfortable Jewish-New York upbringing. "But I was kind of struggling with it, as you always do." Inspiration, he notes, is most often just your brain trying to distract you from whatever it is you are supposed to be doing.

He knew well enough to scribble the idea down. It was certainly strange: a dark romance, more or less a chamber piece, which like his apocalyptic 2014 *Noah* was loosely inspired by his environmental work. "Those issues are important to me," he says. "But I'm not the kind of guy to do a biopic of the guy who started Greenpeace."



Clockwise from above:
Javier Bardem with screen wife Jennifer Lawrence; Developments drive Lawrence up the wall; The couple's house, soon to be overrun; Darren Aronofsky with DP Matthew Libatique.



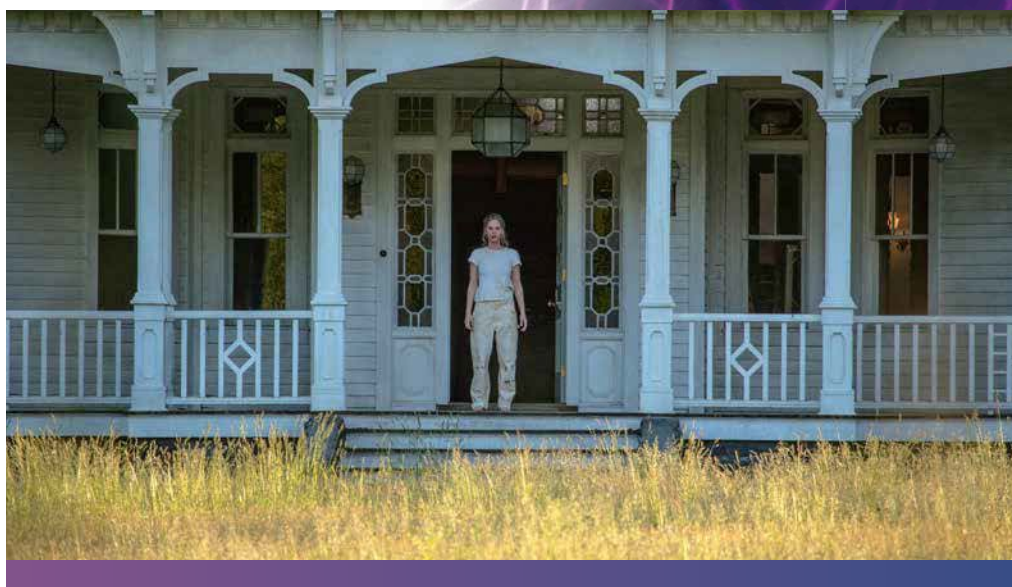
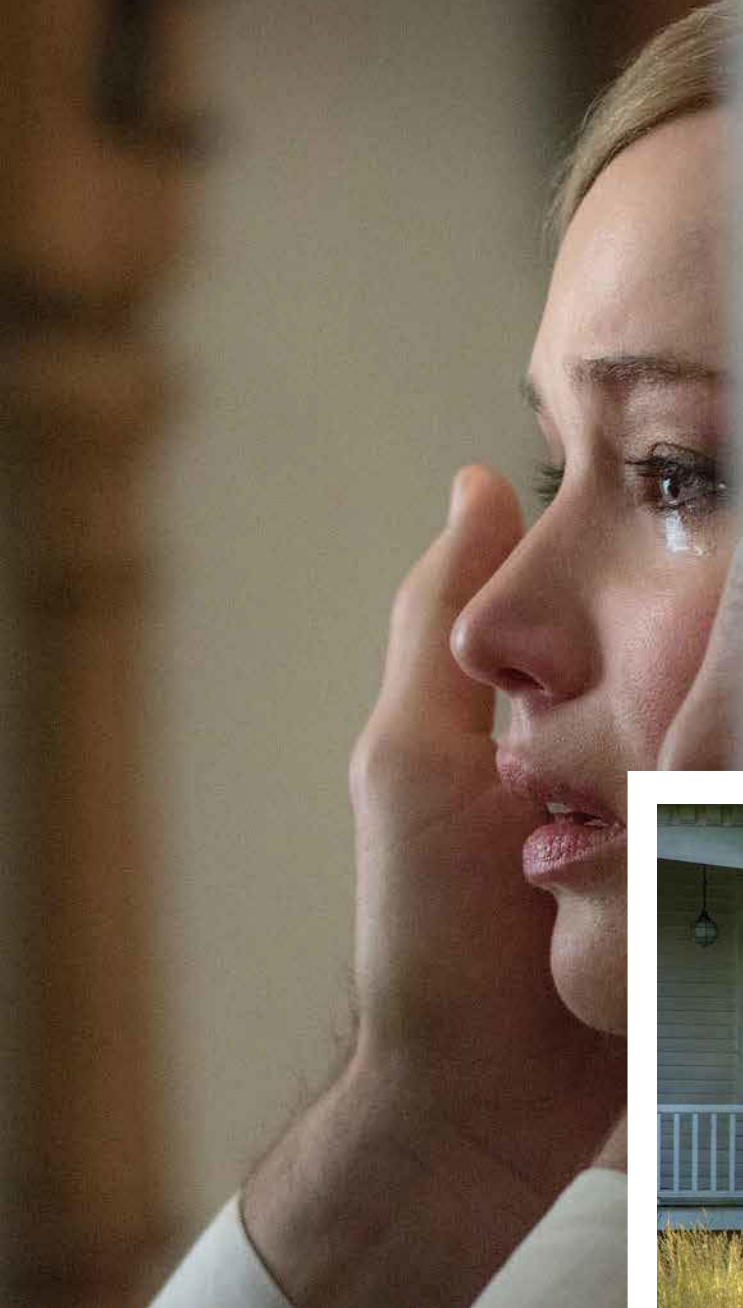
It had struck him that where his parents' generation had been stunned by dire visions of Vietnam beamed into their living rooms via TV sets, society was now assaulted by a blitzkrieg of images resembling Biblical plagues, pinging onto our smartphones: war, famine, poverty, terrorism, umpteen banking crises.

"You just realise how fragile and how insane the world is, the razor edge that we are surviving on. I was also inspired by some personal things, some heartache, and that feeling of being a parent where we are kind of impotent yet filled with rage."

Aronofsky is a contradictory soul. The Brooklyn kid loved Spielberg and Lucas, whereas the knowing Harvard film and social

anthropology student dedicated himself to foreign masters. He has flirted with a *Batman* reboot (to star Clint Eastwood), a messianic take on *Superman*, a *RoboCop* revamp and a film that would kill Wolverine, and we can only hungrily imagine what he would have made of any of them. But his path has led him deeper and darker into the wilderness of his own cravings.

A couple of weeks on from his frenzied scribbles, he found himself at a loose end and sat down at his laptop to see where the idea took him. "It just blew out of me like a fever dream," he remembers. "I couldn't stop. I sat there, not eating, in my underwear the whole time. I wrote the whole thing in five days."



Exhausted but exhilarated, he sent the script to producing partners Scott Franklin and Ari Handel, who he could rely on for a frank assessment. Had he lost his mind? Or was there, maybe, something there?

They were taken aback but impressed, and suggested he risk getting it into the hands of potential stars. Aronofsky's immediate thought was to text his friend Jennifer Lawrence, warning her he was about to send over his new script. He promised it wouldn't be like anything she had read before.

The premise is deceptively simple. Lawrence's shy, young wife lives in a large country house with her older husband (Javier Bardem), a poet of great repute suffering his own Barton Funk. She, meanwhile, is singlehandedly renovating the house, and is certainly not ready for the unwelcome stranger at their door (Ed Harris). He claims to be a surgeon — no-one gives a name — but he chain-smokes, often indoors. Neglecting his wife's growing agitation, the husband becomes strangely preoccupied by their guest. Following the discovery of a bloody parcel in the loo, the surgeon's wife (Michelle Pfeiffer)

arrives and she's completely impossible. When their crazy offspring turn up, all goes to hell — as it were.

Lawrence's reaction was to hurl the script across the room and text Aronofsky back: "There is something seriously wrong with you." Having slept on it, she texted him again: "By the way, it's a masterpiece."

She laughs. "There was a full 24 hours where everybody thought I had turned it down in a really huge way. But it was like reading poetry or scripture, or Darren's diaries: excerpts from a fucked-up mind."

"The second you have Jennifer Lawrence, you have a movie," says Aronofsky. Whatever qualms Paramount's marketing department may have had, they were well aware Aronofsky was never going to deliver *Ride Along*. In under a year from that initial writing session he was shooting.

Told with an intensity feverish even by the standards of cinematic hysteria the director

has already set, *mother!* plummets from comic absurdity into frantic nightmare, as hundreds of house guests swarm through the fragile house. *mother!* isn't predicated on a single, chilling twist like *The Sixth Sense*; here *everything* is twist. There are, Aronofsky is willing to admit, two things going on.

On one hand it is a "big, strong allegory". Everything serves as a potential symbol that fits within the film's ulterior meanings. Something you must decipher like a puzzle. All of Aronofsky's obsessions lurk beneath the cracking plaster: mysticism, religion, numerology, astrology, life, the universe and everything. Lawrence was delighted to finally put her Kentucky childhood Bible study class to use, amazed at how her director has "taken thousand-year-old themes and turned them into a story about what it means to be human". You could see it as an environmental parable, but one that never leaves the interior of a capacious but confusing house that previously burned down. >



Left: Bardem tackles Domhnall Gleeson, the first of many uninvited guests. **Below:** The mystery couple – Michelle Pfeiffer and Ed Harris – appear.

“But underlying that is a true emotional story as well,” insists the director, who began dating Lawrence during the production. “People who have seen it are able to relate to this as a relationship drama between an older man and a younger woman, which is clearly intended. It is always a critique in Hollywood about old movie stars being cast with young ingénues.”

GESTATION

He had never actually pictured the house, but Aronofsky knew it had to be Victorian. The right aesthetic was key. The film appears to be contemporary, but there is something classical about the setting, the kind of big, bony pad harbouring secrets in the basement. “I also knew I wanted the house to have a very circular nature,” he adds, no stranger to renovation himself, having worked on his own home (which he calls his “fourth film”) between *The Fountain* and *The Wrestler*. “I wanted it to be a confused layout, something the audience would have to learn.”

When his production designer suggested an octagon house — an eight-sided architecture popular in 19th-century America — Aronofsky was smitten. The style offered a bewildering variety of angles, with the central winding stairway an echo of that twisting Cyclone. Moreover, if you turn the number eight sideways, it becomes the symbol for infinity.

Shooting in Montreal, the production built two versions of their all-encompassing residence, one on location to allow heavenly daylight to pour through the windows (impossible to replicate in a studio). Once night had fallen, they swapped to the set.

During rehearsal they drew a large chalk outline of the interior to plot out the film’s constant

anxious motion and Polanski-like claustrophobia (“He is an inspiration, full-stop,” says Aronofsky of the *Rosemary’s Baby* director). Meanwhile, the script evolved. “It was a guide, but not the Bible,” says Bardem. “Things were happening: it was flexible, it was dynamic, it was alive.”

The Spanish star describes his poet character as a man driven by a passion for creation, almost to the point of obsession. He has known people like that in his career, powerful people who are always vulnerable. They can be very difficult to deal with. The most important thing was to bring a sense of realism to the story. “And to only point to the allegorical feel,” Bardem explains. “Then you hand that to Darren.”

With Aronofsky, actors tend to suspect there might be something more going on. “Then they want to talk to me,” he laughs. Pfeiffer in particular, who like Harris plays a perversely childish character, with little respect for personal boundaries, had a lot of questions. “She immediately got the character that she was going to play,” he says. “But it took her a while to understand the larger picture I was going for.”

Lawrence describes the wife, a constant source of food for her ungrateful guests, as “very loving, very feminine, and very handy round the

house”. The latter not being something the actor had any affinity with. “Me? No, I would just end up paying someone to undo what I’ve just done.”

To accompany the off-kilter storytelling, Aronofsky devised an equally disorientating approach to his filmmaking. The camera never leaves Lawrence’s increasingly distraught wife as she dashes round her home, trying vainly to restore order. Bardem calls the frenzied choreography a “dance”; the film spins, lurches and plunges, emotionally and physically. There were times when the actor had no idea what was about to happen in a scene. He prayed his director was in control.

“There are only three shots in the language of this movie,” explains Aronofsky. “Over her shoulder, on her face, or a POV of what she is looking at. That made Jen’s job unbelievably difficult.” He has calculated that 66 minutes of the two-hour running time is devoted to Lawrence’s desperate face. “But you are not bored, because she is a remarkable actor who is constantly making you think.”

The burden for Lawrence was immense. Even solo-dramas like *Castaway* or *Buried* are not as tightly wound around the perspective of one character. “We shot pretty chronologically,” she





House party:
Well, that escalated
quickly.

reports. "It started very intimately, just the [lead] actors, Darren and the camera guys, then it grew to 20 extras, to 50, to 100 extras. It became overwhelming, and the set continued to get dirtier and dirtier and dirtier."

As the struggle within the house mounts, so her renovations disintegrate alongside her fragile psyche, like a demonic reboot of *The Money Pit*. Events grow savage as fans and worshippers of the poet turn on his wife.

"This was the hardest movie of my life," Lawrence admits. "It was just the most energy I have had to put into something. It was mentally hard to go to such a dark place. And it was tough to snap out of it."

She has never felt so out of control. In one scene she ventilated so hard she popped a rib. Later, the crew could only gape when, on cut, the leading lady fled the set in tears, with the director giving chase, shouting, "It's not real! It's not real!"

BIRTH

Lawrence has no idea how audiences will respond to *mother!*. She honestly doesn't. It's likely to infuriate some, freak out others, and enthrall yet more.

"It was a scary movie to make," she says. "And it is a scary movie to release."

The bloodstained trailer hints at straight-up horror, but the genre here is Aronofsky. The twinned, lurid posters of poet and wife, the latter depicting Lawrence clutching her heart in her hands, have already inspired a whirligig of interpretations.

"My taste has always been a step to the side of the median," says the director, who spent 52 weeks in post trying to make sense of his images. "I don't know if you would call *Black Swan* a horror film. *The Wrestler* wasn't really a sports movie. *The Fountain* wasn't really a science-fiction film. *Noah* wasn't a typical Biblical movie."

Indeed, you could read *mother!* as Aronofsky's response to his trials on *Noah*, where the film's elastic approach to the Old Testament was compromised in order to appeal to the faith market.

"Look, anytime you throw a hand grenade into the cultural pot, something happens," he says. "I think that tragedy as a form is something that has been lost in Western society. All our movies have happy endings; our culture has become Disneyfied. But I am coming from a good place, with hope."

Bardem, for one, sees *mother!* as an optimistic film, despite its macabre imagery. "There was one thing for me that meant a lot," he offers, "which is the idea of needing to belong. We are created to belong to one another, and to something bigger than ourselves. With the world going the way it is going, it is a film for its time."

Whatever your reaction, it confirms Aronofsky as Hollywood's foremost provocateur and the only director in the world willing to use the word "allegory" in a studio pitch meeting. "Everything comes from his mind," says Lawrence. This is his creation. Amen. ●

MOTHER! IS IN CINEMAS NOW



MARKED FOR SUCCESS

mother! isn't the only film title to deploy an exclamation mark

Safety Last! (1923)

Harold Lloyd's death-defying swing from a clock alone earns the dramatic punctuation. The daredevil actor could probably hang from it.

Them! (1954)

This giant-radioactive-ants classic is the perfect B-movie use of the dramatic screamer. Homaged by *Attack Of The Killer Tomatoes!* and *Mars Attacks!*

Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill! (1965)

Russ Meyer's philosophy was essentially, "If something is worth doing, it's worth overdoing." This went for punctuation as well as attitude and campy.

Oliver! (1968)

Fact! Carol Reed's toe-tappin' musical is the only Best Picture-winner to have an exclamation mark in the title.

Airplane! (1980)

ZAZ's use of the gasper as an extra level of irony was a recurring weapon in their arsenal. Case in point: *The Naked Gun: From The Files Of Police Squad!*

¡Three Amigos! (1986)

John Landis' comedy, an off-the-wall riff on *The Magnificent Seven*, gives you a bonus Spanish-style exclamation mark at the front for free.

Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot (1992)

A rare case of the exclamation mark in the body of the title. If the title ended with *Stop!*, it might have better reflected audience reaction globally.

The Informant! (2009)

If the lower case of *sex, lies, and videotape* is understatement, Steven Soderbergh's whistleblowing drama is the exclamation mark as droll indie grace note. IAN FREER

A man with short brown hair and a light beard is sitting on a metal stand in a studio setting. He is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt and dark trousers. The background is a dark blue curtain. To the left, there is a large, stylized, white graphic of the letters 'N', 'D', 'S', 'T', 'C' and 'K' that spans the height of the page. The man is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

In *Empire's* latest
director-on-director
interview, Jon
Watts chats to Peter
Bogdanovich about
partners-in-crime
classic *Paper Moon*

PORTRAITS
STEVE SCHOFIELD



Jon Watts and
Peter Bogdanovich,
photographed
exclusively for *Empire*
in Los Angeles on
27 June 2017.

When I first saw *Paper Moon* as a kid, I didn't understand what section of the video store it belonged in.

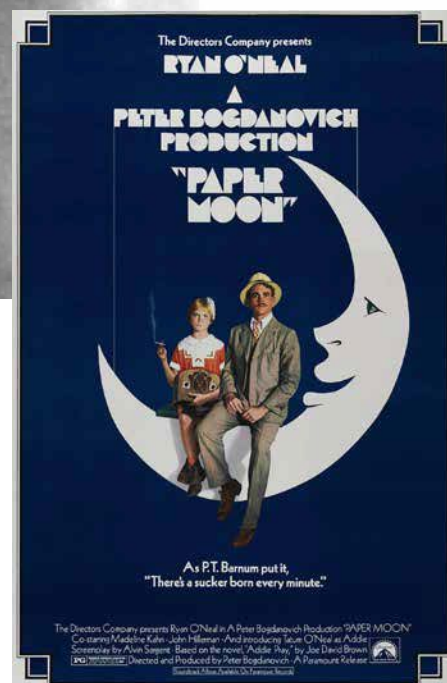
The story of two con artists — a man named Moses Pray (Ryan O'Neal) and the nine-year-old Addie Loggins (Tatum O'Neal) who poses as his daughter — it was set during the Depression and filmed in black-and-white, but the VHS box claimed it was made in the '70s and was a comedy. There were curse words and sexual innuendo but it had a sweetness and humour that felt different from the other 'classic' '70s films I was watching. It was a complete outlier and I loved it from the moment I saw it.

As I learned more about the craft of filmmaking, I returned to *Paper Moon* many times, always discovering new details that deepened my appreciation for the film — the long takes, the use of music, the immaculate production design. To me, there are few films that feel as complete. It's hard to imagine it being filmed; it's as if the film reels just appeared, fully formed and ready. I wanted to talk to Peter Bogdanovich because I wanted to know how he made something so precise look so effortless.

Peter is the ultimate interviewer of directors, so I was understandably nervous about talking to him. *Who The Devil Made It*, his collection of interviews with classic filmmakers, is essential reading for anyone who cares about how films are made. I was worried he'd roll his eyes at my questions. Instead, I found myself sitting across from someone who seemed as excited about his films as when he made them. He loves talking about the process, the happy accidents, the gossip. The thing that doesn't come across in written interviews with Peter is that when he's telling a story about an old star, director or producer, he's doing an uncanny imitation of them. It's as if he's a medium and all the ghosts of old Hollywood are speaking through him.

It was a dream come true, and I left the interview feeling inspired and with a whole new list of questions that I wanted to ask about his other films. I hope I get the chance.

JON WATTS (director of *Spider-Man: Homecoming* and *Cop Car*)



PREVIOUS PAGE: GROOMING BY JHIZET PANOSIAN AT FORWARD ARTISTS. SHOT AT EDGE STUDIOS, LOS ANGELES

Clockwise from left: Addie (Tatum O'Neal) takes a drag; The whippersnapper with her partner-in-crime, Moses (Ryan O'Neal); The one-shot car scene took two days and countless takes; The original 1973 poster; Addie with Trixie Delight's downtrodden maid, Imogene (P.J. Johnson).



Jon Watts: It's so good to meet you. You showed *The Cat's Meow* when I was at NYU and I remember there was a big Q&A but I didn't get a chance to talk to you afterwards. I've always wanted to.

Peter Bogdanovich: Well, here we are.

Watts: I tried to come up with some questions that are not the ones everyone has asked for a thousand years about *Paper Moon*, and I've found that directors love the movie. Everyone loves it, but directors seem to especially love it. It's always on Top 10 Films Of All Time lists. I was trying to figure out why that is, and I think it's because there's a precision to it you don't always see in films. I have a hard time imagining shots that were cut out. Were there any?

Bogdanovich: Nothing.

Watts: It must've taken you five minutes to edit!

Bogdanovich: We actually showed it to the studio three weeks after we wrapped, at Christmas. It was on reels back then. The penultimate reel ends with [Addie] going into Aunt Billie's. The door closed and the lights came up and everybody said, "Is that the end?" I told them, "No, it's a mistake!" and went back to the projection room. Most of the major directors I spoke to in my

interviewing days only shot what they needed.

Watts: That was a way to maintain control in the studio system too, right?

Bogdanovich: It was indeed. There's a great story about [John] Ford. Someone said, "Shall we get a close-up of Walter under the tree?" And he said, "Oh Jesus, no! They'll just use it."

Watts: [Laughs] Every time I watch *Paper Moon*, I pick up something new. I was watching it again last night and one thing I realised this time was how often you use a song and cut it off in the middle of a line. The songs that are playing never resolve in the scene. At the hotel, Addie is listening to *A Picture Of Me Without You*, and it cuts right before it says "you". And then there's the scene later on when they're spying on the bootlegger for the first time and there's *Nobody's Darlin' But Mine*, and right as the lyrics say, "My momma's dead in heaven, my daddy..." you cut. The songs never finish the sentence.

Bogdanovich: The whole idea was to make it feel like it's realistic, the action is just happening. But I stole the idea of using no score from *Rear Window*, Hitchcock's picture. He has a score at

the start and at the end, but all through the rest of the picture, nothing. Just sounds — a record playing or something. I've used it for virtually all the pictures I've made. I think I used a score in *At Long Last Love* [1975] and *Nickelodeon* [1976]. The next picture I'm going to direct is a fantasy film that has ghosts in it and I might use a score for that.

Watts: It's amazing, because you can watch *Paper Moon* on mute and completely follow what's happening.

Bogdanovich: That's nice. I've talked to Allan Dwan who, as Orson Welles said, "started directing sometime around the invention of the electric light". And I asked him when sound came in, how did he feel about it? He said, "Well, I would finish a sound picture, run it silently and if I could follow it, I figured I'd done a pretty good job. If I couldn't, I figured I hadn't done a good job." I haven't done that, but I think to myself how it must play without sound.

Watts: I made a movie with two 10-year-olds in a car [*Cop Car*] and it was difficult. Apparently, the long one-shot with Ryan and Tatum as they're driving took you two days. Did it require an insane amount of takes?

Bogdanovich: We did it 25 times the first day! It was the most difficult scene in the picture. We were pulling the car with a camera car, so all Ryan had to do was pretend to drive. There was a cop ahead of us to make sure we were safe. But there was only one mile of the road that was period — it had some anachronisms before and after — and only one place where you could pull in, pull out and get back. So we would get 10 lines or five lines into it and Tatum would fuck it up and we'd have to go all the way to the turnaround and come back. Ryan said, "Why are we doing this in one shot? Can't we cut?" I said, "You know, families have arguments. But they're not going to walk out on each other — it's just an argument. It's going to end and they'll be together." I felt that we should just watch them, because they're not going to break up: they're family. They're stuck in that frame together.

Watts: That makes so much sense, because when you cut, it releases that tension.

Bogdanovich: And also I thought, "It's a tough scene to play, so it would show the audience, those people who look at those kinds of things, that Tatum can do it."

Watts: As a kid, that she can pull this off and it's not a manufactured performance?

Bogdanovich: Well, you can do a lot with a cut. She had all this business — the map, the radio, >

the cigar box, all that shit. And we shot the scene 25 times and didn't get it. Ryan comes to me and goes, "I did 5,000 episodes of [soap opera] *Peyton Place*, but I'm gonna go crazy! I want to kill her!" We came back three or four days later, because we had rain or something, and did 15 takes and got it in one of those takes.

Watts: It's amazing. It's such a complicated scene too, because they're fighting but also realising that they have to work together. Where are you in that situation? On the camera car?

Bogdanovich: Yeah, I was sitting up front.

Watts: I can imagine the tension, hoping that she doesn't screw up.

Bogdanovich: A lot of tension.

Watts: There's another moment where she's sitting on all the boxes of whiskey they've stolen from the bootlegger and they're pulling out, where it looks like the whole thing is going to fall over.

Bogdanovich: It almost did.

Watts: It seemed genuinely dangerous.

Bogdanovich: The whole movie was dangerous! It was a genuine scream she lets out. I think we nailed some of the boxes down.

Watts: You feel like some are solid, but the top ones are toppling. It makes it pretty thrilling.

Bogdanovich: I hated shooting this movie so much that I came in four days under schedule. My first wife Polly [Platt] was on the picture [as production designer] and we weren't getting along. That was the last one we did together because it just wasn't working. I was just not happy, so I came in under schedule.

Watts: It's always a good motivation for directors to stay under budget and schedule! I read that Steven Spielberg was short on *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* because everyone had food poisoning, so he wrapped a week early. That must have been a difficult situation for you to be working in.

Bogdanovich: It wasn't pleasant.

Watts: Going back a little, how did you come up with the title?

Bogdanovich: Whenever I do a period picture, I look at what songs were popular in that period. This movie was set in 1935, and as I was looking down at the list I saw a song called *It's Only A Paper Moon*. For some reason those two words jumped out at me. And the song kind of goes with the story.





Men on the
Moon: Watts and
Bogdanovich in
conversation.

Watts: The idea that something's not really real, but if you believe in it, it is.

Bogdanovich: Yeah. I said to the studio, "I want to call it 'Paper Moon'." They asked why. "It's a good title, don't you think?" "No." Frank Yablans [Paramount President] said, "The book's a bestseller." It was called *Addie Pray*. I said, "How many copies did it sell?" "100,000." "Gee, if we get 100,000 people that's not a big film..." "Okay..." So he said, "Let's not get into a beef. Let's call it 'Addie Pray' and walk away." So I called Orson Welles, who was in Rome.

Watts: This was in 1972?

Bogdanovich: Yeah. I called him and it was a very bad connection. "Can you hear me?" "Barely. What do you want, I'm cutting..." I said, "Can you just take a minute and tell me what do you think of this title? 'Paper... Moon'." Short pause. "That title is so good, you don't even need to make the picture. Just release the title!"

Watts: [Laughs] They changed the book's title. You can only get it as *Paper Moon* now — you can't find *Addie Pray*...

Bogdanovich: I know, it's a much better title.

Watts: The iconic photograph scene [in which Moses and Addie pose in front of a moon at a carnival] isn't in the book.

Bogdanovich: I called [screenwriter] Alvin Sargent and said, "You know that carnival scene you've got? Let's put a cardboard moon in there so we can take her picture..." He said, "Why?" I said, "So we can call the fucking thing 'Paper Moon' and the studio won't ask why!"

At that point we didn't know how we were going to pay the photograph off at the end. We didn't actually have an ending, even as far through as halfway through the shoot.

Watts: Because it's the middle of the book, essentially, where the movie ends.

Bogdanovich: Yeah. Alvin and I talked about it and thought they ought to end up together. The audience would not buy it if they were apart. ➤

Orson thought that was a terrible ending — he thought it was irresponsible that I'd left it like that — but I told him that was the point. What happened was interesting. It was a series of accidental events. The book is set in the deep South, but I thought there had been too much of that already with Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote and the rest. So [associate producer] Frank Marshall and Polly scouted locations and showed me this road, this little hill, this road that goes on forever. I said, "Where's this?" And they said, "We don't know what it's for, but it's a good road. I agreed, but didn't know what to do with it either. And then I remembered something Leo McCarey said to me: "Always pay everything off." When Polly and I drove across the country in 1964...

Watts: New York to LA, right?

Bogdanovich: Right. We had a car with a cracked block — it was a fucking piece of shit, this car. We were broke. It would overheat easily, so what we would do is, whenever we could, was put it in neutral and coast down a hill. And it all came together. I thought, "She leaves the photograph with him. He tells her he doesn't want her riding with him anymore, but she says he still owes her \$200 and he gets pissed off..."

Watts: And he throws his hat down! In a way, it makes it all feel somewhat inevitable.

They're at a standstill and the fact that the car is going downhill means it just has to keep going.

Bogdanovich: But it all comes from paying everything off, which is a very important thing when you're making a movie, particularly a comedy, or sort of a comedy. That's how the ending came about.

Watts: There's one art-direction touch that I'm curious [about] how intentional it is. There are these ghostly women in the background. Like at the diner in the Coney Island hot dog scene, there's an ad of a woman in the background behind Ryan. And in the scene near the end with the piano, on the piece of sheet music there's this picture of a woman. And then there's a third example when they're about to do the scam with the bootleggers — she's reading a magazine and it has a picture of a woman smoking on it. So it feels like there's these ghostly versions of a mom throughout the movie.

Bogdanovich: That's really good, I'm going to use that! I didn't think of it.

Watts: This is just me projecting onto the movie. In a way, at the end, after Moses disappears and Addie is standing on the corner, you hear his voice very softly and quietly. It's almost like it feels higher-pitched to me, almost like a ghost.



Bogdanovich: Yeah, well, he's going away.

Watts: And the city is almost deserted.

I guess everyone's at church... But there's a building that's half knocked down. It feels ghostly and spooky. I took all that with the ghostly mother idea that is throughout the scenes.

Bogdanovich: I'll buy that from you!

Watts: You can take it! Madeline Kahn is amazing as Trixie Delight. How did you meet her? Because her first movie was *What's Up, Doc?* [in 1972], right?

Bogdanovich: I went to New York when I was casting that for a couple of days to see some actors there. Nessa Hyams was the casting director and she pulled a few people for me to see, including Austin

Pendleton and Madeline. She came in, we were talking and I was laughing and she asked me why. I said, "Because you're funny!" "I am?" She didn't think she was funny.

Watts: Was she more a singer at that point?

Bogdanovich: She was on Broadway with Danny Kaye in a play called *Two By Two*, I think, about Noah's Ark. I didn't see it, I didn't have time to.

Watts: She really didn't think she was funny?

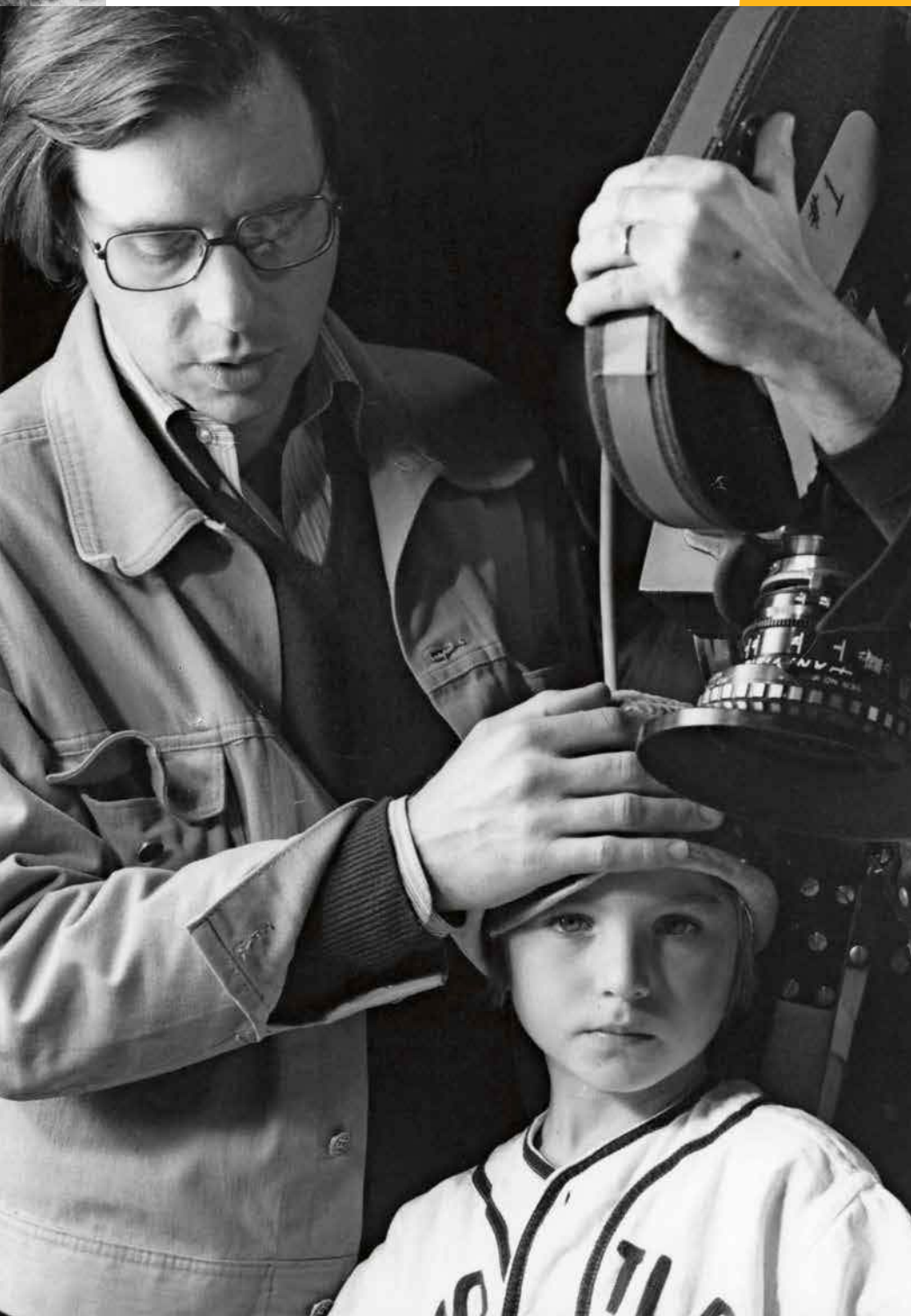
Bogdanovich: She didn't know. I just cast her from talking to her — she didn't read for me.

Watts: I laugh at everything she does in the movie, even just the smallest gestures.

Bogdanovich: She's brilliant. She told me she went to see *What's Up, Doc?* at Radio City

Clockwise from left:

The final emotional stand-off between Moses and Addie; Working the charm on Madeline Kahn's Trixie Delight (right); Bogdanovich subjects Tatum O'Neal to an extreme close-up; Ryan O'Neal consults Bogdanovich on the set of *Paper Moon*.



Music Hall and 6,500 people laughed, so she went to therapy.

Watts: They wanted to make a sequel to *Paper Moon*, didn't they, called 'Harvest Moon'?

Bogdanovich: They wanted to call it that. I said, "We just did it, let's not do it again."

Watts: Was it the continued adventures?

Bogdanovich: The second half of the book. It's a scam on this old lady.

Watts: That wouldn't be fun.

Bogdanovich: I didn't want to do it.

Watts: But they made the TV show!

Bogdanovich: Yeah, that was funny.

Watts: It's funny that it's Jodie Foster, looking back on that.

Bogdanovich: Isn't it?

Watts: She's good...

Bogdanovich: She is. What happened is, they called me up and told me they were doing a TV series and did I want to be involved? I said, "Don't call it 'Paper Moon'." They said, "Are you kidding? It's a million-dollar title."

Watts: Now!

Bogdanovich: So I said, "Why don't you call it 'The Adventures Of Addie Pray'?" "No, no — *Paper Moon*." I said, "You gonna shoot it in colour or black-and-white?" "Colour." "That's not going to look good." "Why not?"

"Because it's too pretty, like a Disney movie."

That's why I did the movie in black-and-white in the first place.

Watts: Why didn't you shoot *Nickelodeon* in black-and-white?

Bogdanovich: They wouldn't let me. There is a version of it in black-and-white on DVD now.

Watts: So that was always the intention?

Bogdanovich: Yeah. I had two fucking hits in the same decade, in black-and-white, but [executive] David Begelman said the picture was too big for it.

Watts: Jumping back a bit, what would Orson Welles have been working on in 1972? A TV thing?

Bogdanovich: A television show. There's a new book that's quite interesting called *Young Orson*, by a guy whose name I can't remember. It's quite a good book, about everything before *Citizen Kane*. He had an amazing career early on.

Watts: Every time I think about how old I am, I feel like a complete failure.

Bogdanovich: I do too! 🍷

**BY 2017 THE WORLD ECONOMY HAS
COLLAPSED. FOOD, NATURAL RESOURCES
AND OIL ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY. A POLICE
STATE, DIVIDED INTO PARAMILITARY ZONES,
RULES WITH AN IRON HAND.**

**NO DISSIDENT IS TOLERATED,
AND YET A SMALL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT
HAS MANAGED TO SURVIVE UNDERGROUND...**

THIRTY YEARS ON FROM ITS RELEASE, A SEEMINGLY MINDLESS ARNIE ACTION FLICK LOOKS STARTLINGLY PROPHETIC.

THE RUNNING MAN

SCREENWRITER **STEVEN E. DE SOUZA** TELLS THE WILD STORY BEHIND ITS CREATION



THE CALLS ALWAYS

come in around Thanksgiving. So when my assistant told me I had five messages from reporters, and two requests for on-air interviews, my response was, “Let me guess: the annual ‘Is *Die Hard* a Christmas movie?’ debate again?” “No, they’re all about *The Running Man*.”

I admit, I was surprised. True, since election day it had crossed my mind that reality was beginning to mirror my 30-year-old film, but I assumed that was simply my own insular navel-gazing from inside my Hollywood ivory tower. (Actually a one-storey California rancher, but the metaphor holds.) But apparently a film set in the amazing future year of 2017, in which the Department of Justice has an Entertainment Division, the President has a theatrical agent, two actors are future US Governors and a reality TV show host holds the reins of power, had not gone unnoticed by others — including *Empire*’s editors.

I’m not saying there’s necessarily a connection between my keyboard and quantum reality: there are no flatscreen televisions or electric cars in the picture’s vision of 2017, nary a mobile phone, and Maria Conchita Alonso’s bootleg music is still on cassettes. But it’s impossible to look at the film now and not think, “Wait a minute, am I watching

CNN?” Of course, the comparison between Trump and villainous game-show host Killian only goes so far: at least Killian doesn’t tweet.

IT ALL STARTED with a book and a delayed flight. One of the producers, George Linder, bought it at an airport on a layover, and, not even knowing ‘Richard Bachman’ was Stephen King’s *nom de plume*, optioned it. He brought it to fellow producer Rob Cohen, then an executive on the Columbia lot. That’s where I came in, when future *Die Hard* producer Joel Silver recommended me to Rob for the screenplay adaptation. The basics were there: the dystopian future, the TV show where people are hunted to their death. But on the journey from page to soundstage much would change, starting with the ending. The novel’s climax had hero Ben Richards hijack a plane and crash it into the network building. The studio didn’t want the hero to die — thus sparing us all yet another uncomfortable movie/reality comparison.



The studio’s first casting idea was Christopher Reeve, envisioned as a high-school teacher whose liberal curriculum put him in the regime’s crosshairs. Reeve was interested, pending a rewrite, but in the interim industry buzz was building about *Commando*, the movie I had just wrapped with Arnold Schwarzenegger. Though the taciturn roles of Conan The Barbarian and the Terminator had made him a household name, it was *Commando* that really introduced the Arnold persona that propelled him into super-stardom and, yes, politics.

Once Arnold was in the frame, more deviations from the book were inevitable. A future so economically depressed that the hero had to volunteer for a brutal game show to feed his family becomes problematic with Arnold in the role — surely he could get a job delivering pianos? That led to the idea that other circumstances led him there, and the Roman Colosseum, gladiators and *panem et circenses* naturally followed. Arnold’s casting also impacted the film’s villains: the book’s ‘Hunters’

Far left: Ron Cobb's concept art for the stormtroopers and (bottom) the film version.

Below left: Steven E. de Souza (left) with producers Rob Cohen, George Linder and Tim Zinnemann. Here: Killian (Richard Dawson) with contestant Ben Richards (Arnold Schwarzenegger).

Below: Storyboards depicting Ben's game-show intro.



were anonymous figures in the guise of ordinary citizens. While those were sufficient adversaries for a protagonist King described as “scrawny”, we now had to come up with villains bigger and badder than our 6’ 2”, 230lb hero. So we brainstormed colourful, supersized, wrestler-like characters, who were revised as we went along. So ‘the Hangman’ morphed into ‘Buzzsaw’, while ‘Captain Freedom’ began as ‘the Viking’ (with Dolph Lundgren as the model before Jesse Ventura, later Governor of Minnesota, was cast).

A bigger problem was King’s portrayal of the game show. I don’t know whether he didn’t get TV reception up in Maine when he was writing it, but the book’s future game show resembled a programme from the 1950s: just a host with a microphone and a pretty girl with index cards. By the era of our production, game shows were in an arms race to outdo each other with gimmicks and eye candy. So ours became an outrageous potpourri of every trope imaginable, complete with audience participation, literal fireworks and dancing girls choreographed by Paula Abdul at the start of her career.



The shoot turned out to be that rare Hollywood production with more directors than writers. First through the revolving door was George Cosmatos, who had just done *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. His family in Greece had suffered under Nazi occupation, and with that history the Cosmatos draft got very dark. He also wanted to outdo *Rambo*’s stunts and locations. We went on a scout in Vancouver for a sequence in which Richards goes down some rapids to escape pursuers. George also wanted the world of the film’s elites to be a biosphere insulated from the chaos outside, so another recee flagged the then-largest shopping centre in the world, the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada.

When I turned in the draft, the studio priced it up and said, “It’s going to cost \$24 million. You need to get it down to \$17 million.” George said that number was impossible, refused to budge, and left. (He was right: without ever leaving Los Angeles, the production ended up costing \$26 million.)

The studio pursued *Sid & Nancy* director Alex Cox, who dearly wanted to do it, but was too deep into *Walker* to fit us into his schedule. Next was Swiss director Carl Schenkel, who was on and off the movie so quickly my only glimpse of him was the back of his head in an elevator. Then came Ferdinand Fairfax. Ferdie had a fascinating idea that *The Running Man* should be in its entirety the actual broadcast of the fictional show. He also had the notion that a fixture of a British film set — the tea lady, with her cart of coffee, tea and biscuits — should periodically appear out of nowhere, whereupon Hunters, prey and studio crew alike would pause like the armies in *The Man Who Would Be King* when the Holy Men pass through the scene. Alas, this was perhaps too Python-esque for an American studio, and Ferdie was gone before you could say, “What is the capital of Assyria?”

Andrew Davis actually started shooting the movie. But seven days in, executive producer Rob Cohen called me and said, “Come to dailies today.” I had just picked my young daughter up from gymnastics, so I brought her along. In the screening room were a handful of executives... and Arnold, direct from the set in his yellow jumpsuit. The film started: action footage of the ice-rink fight with Subzero, so there was no dialogue, just the hypnotic whirr of the projector, with the smoke curling up from Arnold’s cigar in the light beam like the opening scene of *Citizen Kane*.

“UGH! That’s so gross!” The stage whisper was at my elbow, coming from the only person in the room in a leotard. “Mister, could you please put that out?” Everyone froze. Then Arnold smiled and put out the cigar. Only the first stage in his chivalry, because Amy promptly fell asleep on Arnold, who left her undisturbed... a word that could hardly describe the mood in the room when the lights came up.

The last several shots had shown Arnold palming something from the ice: one of the dead Stalkers’ exploding hockey pucks. This wasn’t from the script, but something Andy had

pitched in a meeting. In Act III, he'd suggested, when all seems lost, Ben Richards blows away Killian's last studio guards with the pilfered puck! When it was pointed out that would make Arnold's character a shiteel who'd let his friends die one by one, keeping the puck in reserve just to save his own ass, that had seemed to be the end of it. Instead, Andy shot it and it meant the end of his tenure. Fittingly enough, he went from this brief sentence in movie jail to *Above The Law*.

WITH OUR RELEASE date looming ahead like the Titanic's iceberg, Michael Mann came to the rescue. An old friend of Rob Cohen's from their *Miami Vice* days, he now recommended Paul Michael Glaser. Best known as the original Starsky on the '70s TV show, Glaser had moved more and more into directing. More importantly, after 20 years working at American television's brutal pace, he could hit the ground running.

Because the multiple start and stops had bled the already-stretched budget, we couldn't afford to shoot the other TV shows supposedly aired by the ICS Network. We did get in 'Climbing For Dollars' and a poster for 'The Hate Boat', but the other programmes were reduced to off-camera audio (listen carefully: they're still there). Dynamo's opera singing was a last-minute change. The Dutch actor, Erland van Lidth, mentioned he could do it and we thought it was funny. Sadly, he died of a heart attack before the film came out. (In a bizarre touch, his family asked for a preview print of the film to show at his memorial service, a scene I can barely imagine, and I make up stuff like this for a living.)

Richard Dawson was our casting director Jackie Burch's brilliant choice. Not only was he an experienced actor, he was the real-life host of *Family Feud*. But his performance as Killian became problematic on two levels. On the game-show set he was ad-libbing like mad, kissing Paula's dancers and engaging the extras. Wonderful as this was, it was tilting the balance of the film. And he simply refused to allow his character to show any fear of Arnold. In post-production we were so desperate for a moment like that, we printed a reaction shot of Dawson backwards to make him look nervous.

Killian's aren't the only good lines in the movie. What's funny is how many of them were put in after we shot it. Several days of ADR (automatic dialogue replacement) are built into actors' contracts, but you never have them come in until the movie is locked editorially. So as we prepared for our test screening, the question was, "What do we do about these missing lines for Arnold?" As it happened, I'm famous from Silver Lake to Malibu for my Arnold impression, which I've used over the years to prank studio executives on the phone. So I ended up recording multiple lines, several of which survive by accident in the finished film. At the 11th hour, another of our producers, Tim Zinnemann, penned a now eerily prescient opening crawl, the negative of which was still wet when we rushed the print to Palm Springs for our sneak preview.

Arnold's first appearance on screen was greeted by thunderous applause. The laughs were in all the right places, and once Dawson came on screen, I saw an audience embrace a villain to a degree I didn't encounter again until Hans Gruber.

And then Killian — the man the audience loved to hate — became the man they hated with a vengeance, when Arnold and Maria were both brutally killed by Jesse Ventura's Captain Freedom. The entire theatre gasped as one. Then, when they realised they'd been duped, their relief and joy was explosive.

Monday I came into the office and was surprised to see the tenth reel broken down. When I asked why, I was told two scenes were being swapped. Incredibly, these were the scenes where Jesse 'killed' Arnold and Maria, and the subsequent scene explaining that this had been staged by Killian with digital trickery. I was sure I wasn't hearing this right — it would be the equivalent of, in *The Sting*, having Redford and Newman say, "Let's pretend to kill each other..." The reasoning? A studio suit had fixated on the audience comment cards, where some viewers who otherwise gave the film a "Definitely Recommend" score filled out the, "Was there any part you didn't like, and why?" with, "I didn't understand how Killian fooled the audience." In an audience of over 600 people, there were less than a dozen cards like that, but such is the strength of audience research weighed against a studio executive's backbone. In the film as finished, watching the fight is like watching a replay of a horse race after you know the outcome. Your pulse doesn't even rise, and it's my biggest regret about the film to this day. Well, along with the yellow jumpsuits.

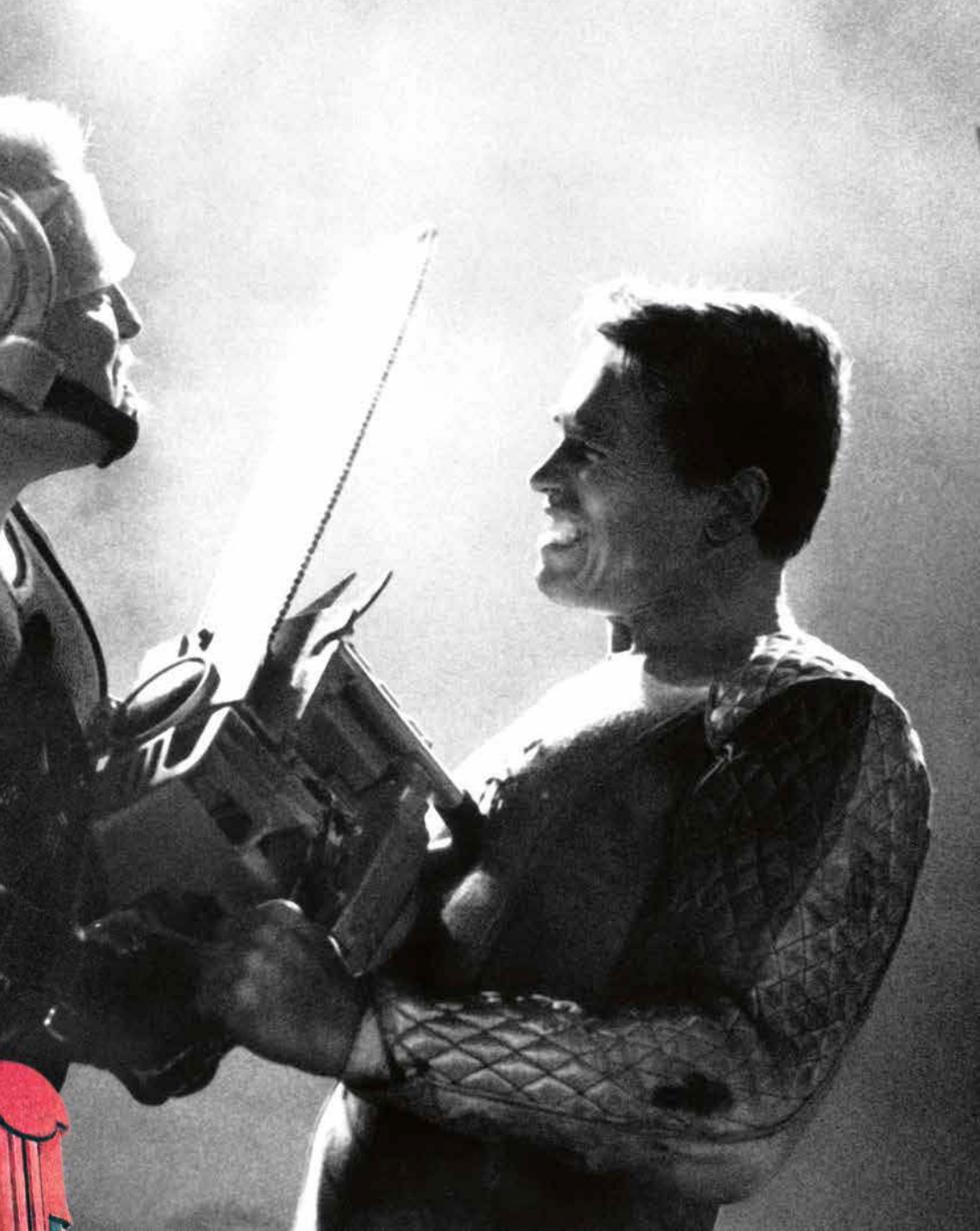
THIRTY YEARS ON,

assuming "current reality" is not an option, what is the film's legacy? If you Google "Fuck You, Hunger Games", you'll find a video with someone doing an Arnold impersonation (mine is better), singing about the similarities between *The Hunger Games* and *The Running Man*. (You could throw *Battle Royale* in there, too.) The decapitation collar has been emulated many times, and a producer of *American Gladiators* admitted to me they deliberately copied us, even showing clips in their network pitch.

Arnold himself has been talking about plans for a sequel, reboot or hybrid blend of both. For myself, I'd like to see someone dive into the studio vault and dig out the original cut with Arnold's 'death' in it as planned. Fortunately with a Blu-ray, you can now use your remote control to put those scenes back in the original order and forget reality's version. And if you wish that that do-over also applied to the real world, take heart: although the opening scene takes place in 2017, the bulk of *The Running Man* unfolds two years later. So insert the "this is fine" dog meme here, and drink until 2019! ●

Clockwise from below: Ron Cobb's concept art for Ripsaw, and (here) his on-screen iteration, renamed Buzzsaw and played by Gus Rethwisch; Maria Conchita Alonso as Amber; Captain Freedom (Jesse Ventura) fights Ben; The running man.





POST-APOCALYPSE NOW

THREE MORE DYSTOPIAN MOVIES THAT TAKE PLACE IN 2017

CHERRY 2000 (1987)

The age-old tale of a man trying to take his sex-bot back to the factory for repairs, this curio had its release repeatedly postponed, before making just \$14,000 from a \$10 million budget. The plot sees tracker Edith (Melanie Griffith), businessman Sam (David Andrews) and his robotic love-mate Cherry (Pamela Gidley) travel across a ravaged wasteland, heading for the town of Glory Hole.

HOW CLOSE TO REALITY?

Sexy robots haven't really caught on outside of certain technology conferences. Neither has the crimson bouffant hairdo sported by Griffith.

FORTRESS (1992)

The US government decrees that families may only have one child, so ex-soldier John Brennick (Christopher Lambert) and his wife (Loryn Locklin), who is pregnant for the second time, make for Canada. Alas, they're busted and Brennick is sentenced to 31 years in a prison called the Fortress. Inmates are given 'Intestinator' implants and monitored by a terrifying computer called Zed-10.

HOW CLOSE TO REALITY?

American prisons are yet to be kitted out with flamethrower cyborgs and laser-guns. But give Trump time.

BARB WIRE (1996)

Essentially *Casablanca* with added stunts, cleavage and Meat Puppets In Vapourspace song, Paramount's lambasted actioner swaps Humphrey Bogart for Pamela Anderson, as Barb, owner of nightclub the Hammerhead during the Second American Civil War. She battles bad guys, often using a stiletto heel, in a bid to get a bioweapon scientist safely to Toronto.

HOW CLOSE TO REALITY?

A dodgy cabal have seized control of the US government, racists are on the rise and times are so tough that Americans insist on payment in Canadian dollars. On the other hand, it depicts a world in which Tommy Lee's music is popular. NICK DE SEMLYEN



SPOILER
WARNING

REVIEW

THE INDISPENSABLE GUIDE TO HOME ENTERTAINMENT



DVD DVD **BR** BLU-RAY **UV** ULTRAVIOLET **4K** 4K **N** NETFLIX **FX** FOXTEL **S** STAN **Apple** iTunes **▶** GOOGLE PLAY

THE EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2

Director James Gunn sheds light on his latest awesome cinematic mixtape

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



00.04.41

DANCING GROOT — After a brief prologue set on Earth in 1980, *GOTG Vol. 2* thumbs its nose to action movie protocol by keeping an epic space battle in the background in favour of Baby Groot (mo-capped by Gunn himself) dancing to ELO's *Mr Blue Sky*. With many elements filmed early on in the process and using over 4,000 layers, Gunn calls this "probably the most complicated visual effects shot ever created for film."

THE
EMPIRE
VERDICT

GUARDIANS
OF THE
GALAXY
VOL. 2
★★★★
RATED M

What we said: "There's plenty to enjoy here, whether it's the perfectly deployed Baby Groot moments, or the anarchic weirdness that still feels unique to this franchise."
Notable extras: A Gunn commentary, deleted scenes, some featurettes and a gag reel.



00.26.57

CLIFFHANGER 2 __ On the brothel planet of Contraxia, Yondu (Michael Rooker) has a shouting match with his old Ravager buddy, Stakar Ogord (Sylvester Stallone). "Rooker is an incredibly intense actor and it's very difficult to have another actor yelling at him and have it be believable that Rooker is diminished," says Gunn of casting Stallone, a suggestion first made by executive producer and Marvel mainstay Louis D'Esposito.



00.57.32

DRAX THE DESTROYED __ In a film where Dave Bautista's Drax is consistently hilarious, as the empathic Mantis (Pom Klementieff) literally feels the pain he carries with him about his dead daughter, it's a reminder he's more than comic relief. Initially, the scene featured a speech by Mantis that was taken out at the suggestion of editor Craig Wood. "You get every single bit of what she said on her face," adds Gunn.



01.07.45

RAVAGING THE RAVAGERS __ In the film's most audacious sequence, Yondu, Rocket (Bradley Cooper) and Groot turn the table on their Ravager captors by killing them all in cold blood. "And laughing while they're doing it!" adds Gunn. "People say Baby Groot is Disneyfication. Disneyfication? He brutally murders a man because he's angry! The morality in outer space is not the same as it is on Earth."



01.16.19

GAMORA GOT A GUN __ When Gamora (Zoe Saldana) is attacked by her sister Nebula (Karen Gillan) in a sequence that apes the cropduster scene in *North By Northwest*, things escalate until the greenskinned daughter of Thanos lets rip. "I saw my friend James Wan's *Fast & Furious 7* and *The Rock* has a giant gun in that," laughs Gunn, "I said, 'Fuck you, Rock, I'll make a much bigger gun and give it to Zoe Saldana.'"



01.28.35

EGO'S ID __ After much teasing, Kurt Russell's Ego – the long-lost father of Star-Lord (Chris Pratt) – finally reveals his villainous intent, and drops the bombshell: his role in the death of Peter's beloved mother. "That was a huge error on his part," admits Gunn. "But there is a piece of him that is incredibly lonely and alienated. He does have this desire to bond with his son. The thing that kills him is his desire to be loved."



01.40.02

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK __ As the final battle rages *inside* the body of Ego (who is a planet, after all), Star-Lord sighs, "What a day!" before plunging back into the fray. Your ears don't deceive you – the film takes place in "a little more than a day," clarifies Gunn. It echoes *The Empire Strikes Back*'s timeframe, coincidentally. "It's my natural style. *Guardians Vol. 1* and *2* only take place in a couple of days."



01.40.36

THE DEATH BUTTON __ "This is very much the bookend of the opening sequence," says Gunn of the standout moment in which Rocket and Groot have a very Abbott and Costello-like conversation about the impromptu bomb Rocket has built. "There's a minute-long shot of Rocket waiting and coughing, and Groot fiddling with the wire while there's obviously a humongous battle going on outside the cavern that we never see."



01.44.21

GUARDIANS... ASSEMBLE! __ The Guardians, including new members Yondu and Nebula, stand together to battle Ego, only to have a rogue rock knock out Mantis. Gunn always intended to swell the Guardians' numbers in this movie. "When Karen Gillan came in to read for Nebula, I told her the plan is that Nebula will join them. I love the path of the redeemed villain – that's what all the Guardians are."



01.53.59

YONDU, YONDON'T __ Yondu's Guardians subscription is short-lived, as Quill's adoptive dad sacrifices himself to save his boy. Disney's Alan Horn mooted the idea, Gunn admits he resisted. "Then I realised it was a true act of love, of heroism, and that's what *Guardians* is at its very core."

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2 IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

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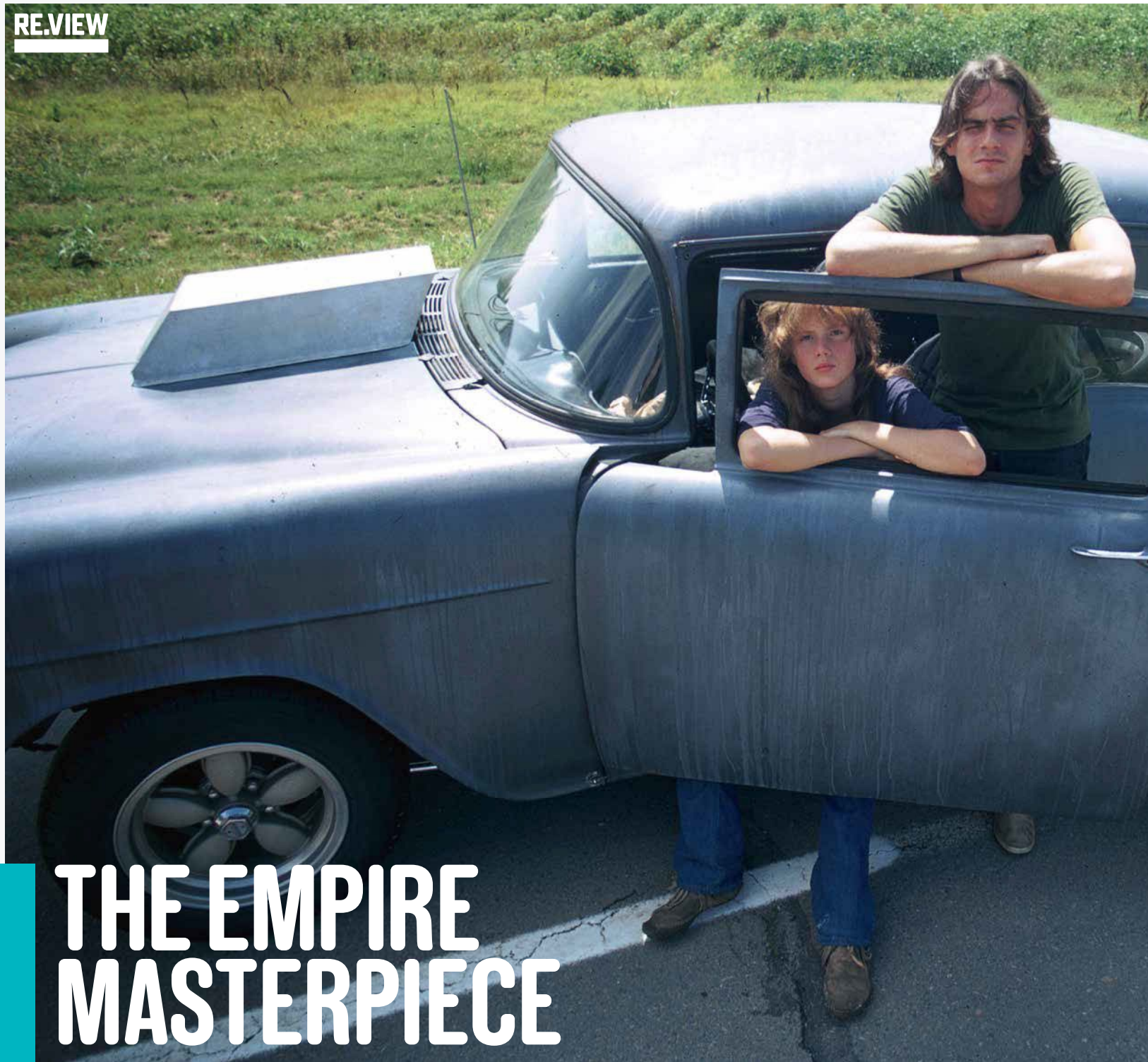
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THE EMPIRE MASTERPIECE

TWO-LANE BLACKTOP

A road movie that goes the full Monte

1971 / RATED M
WORDS ADAM SMITH

DIRECTOR MONTE HELLMAN has always felt like a footnote in the grand story of Hollywood's last Golden Age: an outsider amongst outsiders, rarely mentioned in the same breath as the likes of Coppola, Lucas and Scorsese. But his brief filmography, in *Ride In The Whirlwind* and *The Shooting*, a brace of 'acid Westerns' he shot for Roger Corman back-to-back and for under \$80,000, contains two of the decade's most distinctive films. And in *Two-Lane Blacktop* he created arguably the best, possibly the strangest, and certainly the purest, road movie ever made.

If Hellman's minor-key masterpiece never really got the kudos of the other classics of the period, it was cut from the same cloth of its better-known stablemates. In late 1969, after

the shocking success of *Easy Rider*, bewildered executives at Universal unpacked the ancient cultural ear-trumpet, detected something of a youthquake in progress, and promptly panicked. "It was frightening," studio bigwig Ned Tanen later remembered. "These were ageing gentlemen who did not remotely understand where their audience had gone. Suddenly we were looking at these movies where everybody was dropping acid, and fucking in the park."

Their solution was to throw money, albeit small amounts, at the problem. A new unit, headed up by Tanen, was tasked with finding projects that might resonate with the hip, new audience. Tanen rushed low-budget projects into production, including Douglas Trumbull's eco sci-fi, *Silent Running*, and *The Hire Hand*, an

On the road: The Girl
(Laurie Bird), The
Driver (James Taylor)
and The Mechanic
(Dennis Wilson).



anti-Western by Peter Fonda, who Tanen hoped might repeat the magic he had wrought with *Easy Rider*, and later George Lucas' *American Graffiti*. But among these hail Mary productions, *Two-Lane Blacktop* at least had the trappings of conventional commercial success in its automotive theme. What's more, it had two genuine pop icons attached in the form of Beach Boys drummer Dennis Wilson and singer-songwriter James Taylor.

Monte Hellman had been sent the original screenplay while in Italy prepping an adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's *The Two Faces Of January*, which would ultimately never be shot. Hating it, he had nevertheless seen promise in the central idea, and having read cult novel *Nog*, appointed

its author Rudy Wurlitzer to come up with a screenplay. Wurlitzer dumped almost everything in the way of conventional story, instead focussing on the mostly silent characters and their strange, compulsive race. In his script, the wide-open spaces of the American landscape are matched, and occasionally dwarfed, by the fascinating emptinesses where conventional plot should be. If Antonioni had been a petrolhead Beach Boys fan, he might have come up with something like *Two-Lane Blacktop*.

The film that emerged after an eight-week shoot on a final budget just shy of \$900,000 is, then, a quietly magnificent exploration of four characters, all desperate in their own ways, in search of some kind of meaning, set against the sometimes ragged, sometimes spectacular backdrop of America's Southwest. The Driver (Taylor) and The Mechanic (Wilson) are lank-haired hipsters, who make their living racing their souped-up 1955 Chevy. By chance, they meet an inexplicably competitive older man (the inestimable Warren Oates, who had worked with Hellman previously on *The Shooting*), whose state-of-the-art, banana-yellow Pontiac GTO may (or may not) be a metaphor for the flashy inauthenticities of the rat race. Mostly at GTO's behest, they agree to race to Washington DC, the winners to take the loser's car.

During the rest-stops and random hitchhikers picked up along the way (look out for a young H.D. Stanton, later to be Harry Dean, as a gay passenger) that function as brief opportunities for unreliable exposition, GTO variously claims to be a test pilot and a TV location scout. A fourth cipher arrives with The Girl, played by Laurie Bird, a New York model who later committed suicide in Art Garfunkel's apartment. A blank-faced ingénue who attracts the attention both of The Driver and GTO, she has more than a little of the mesmerising, natural air of her contemporary, Sissy Spacek.

The most obvious point of comparison is, of course, Fonda's counter-cultural carnival *Easy Rider*, but Hellman's film is quieter, sadder and more deeply felt. And at its heart is a towering performance by Oates. The only professional actor amongst the cast, he radiates a bruised, nervous vanity. His various dreams — to go to New York, or Florida, or finally Mexico — come and go as quickly as his fantasies about his past. He's a man obsessed with racing who was long ago left behind. Ironically enough, it's his performance as the senior man in this youth-oriented film that lends *Two-Lane Blacktop* its heartbreaking, occasionally funny timelessness.

Seventies audiences didn't dig Hellman's film and his career would never really recover. Subsequently, he embarked on his own eclectic odyssey, performing second-unit duties on Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop* and executive-producing *Reservoir Dogs* among other detours. (Now aged 85, he still teaches film in California.) But though *Two-Lane Blacktop* may, in all sorts of ways, be a road to nowhere, boy, is it worth the trip.

REVIEW

KIDS WATCH CLASSICS

Big films tackled by little people

ILLUSTRATION OLLY GIBBS



JOSEPH HOWES — 7 THREE AMIGOS!

What did you think about the film?

It was really funny and so I liked it. The characters were goofing around and being stupid.

What did you think the film was going to be about?

I didn't think it was going to be very funny at first, because the cover of the DVD didn't really look funny. But when I heard the song [*The Ballad Of The Three Amigos*], I realised it was going to be funny. When they did the, "Aaaaaaaaah," bit for a really long time, it absolutely drove me nuts!

Who was your favourite member of the Three Amigos?

I thought they were all really funny and silly. But my favourite one was probably the Amigo with the guitar, Dusty Bottoms [Chevy Chase], because when he plays the guitar in the desert, all the creatures come along to see what's going on. Like, an owl turns up! And then a tortoise says, "Goodnight Ned!"

Was that your favourite part?

No. I think the bit I liked best was probably when... they were all good, but when Dusty shoots the invisible swordsman. Because you don't expect him to be stood right beside them, but he's invisible! Then he falls — PLONK! — in the sand!

Did you have a least favourite bit?

Not really, actually. Everything made me laugh.

Who should watch this movie?

Whoever reads this! You should watch it!

What star rating would you give it, out of five?

A million! Or five, because it's so funny. I just have to give it five!



Baker's Doctor in
'The Horns Of
Nimon'.

BAKER'S HALF DOZEN

The Fourth Doctor on his greatest *Doctor Who* moments

WORDS SEB PATRICK

TOM BAKER IS one of the most iconic Doctors, defining the character's key traits of whimsy, charm and manic unpredictability. Here, the ever-mercurial actor walks us through his time in the TARDIS.



ROBOT (1974)

In his first appearance, Baker was given the line, "There's no point in being grown-up if you can't be childish sometimes."

"When I took over, Jon Pertwee had stamped on it so hard that the writers, for quite a while, they were all still writing for him. I was wrenching Jon's idiom, to make it my own. And of course, over time, they began to write for me. But that line, it's quite a charming bit of nonsense, isn't it? It's the one that people still ask me to quote."



GENESIS OF THE DALEKS (1975)

The origin story of The Doctor's most famous foes saw him faced with a moral dilemma over whether to destroy them at the point of their creation. "The Doctor does tend to moralise slightly, and to waffle on about it a bit. He's always on the side of good, but good and evil is often a very complicated relationship. He might even border

on being a bit preachy sometimes — but we tried to mask that a bit!"



CITY OF DEATH (1979)

A hugely popular story in which The Doctor and Lalla Ward's Romana experience time distortion. Co-written by Douglas Adams, it was filmed on location in Paris.

"That was a particularly fine script, and it was lovely to work with Julian Glover — a big, classical actor. There I was, trotting around in some smart area of Paris with my long coat on and my long hair and my flying scarf. All the people around, they just thought I was some quaint artistic type, dashing around Paris and showing off a bit."

BBC



LOGOPOLIS (1981)

After a record-breaking seven years in the role, Baker handed over the reins to Peter Davison.

"When the moment comes, it's really rather poignant, that you're going off and letting someone else have a go. But it wasn't all that painful. I slipped out of it, and went off and did other things — of course, nothing approaching the success of *Doctor Who*. But I never really stopped. I've spent half of my life playing this part!"

THE FOURTH DOCTOR ADVENTURES (2012)

In fact, Baker returned to the role of The Doctor for a series of audio dramas, produced by Big Finish, and is still going strong in the role.

"It's so wonderful to be still in demand in this glorious part which fits me like a glove, really. We work a long way ahead, so some of my stuff now won't come out for maybe four years. That's an incredible thought, because, in four years' time I might be, as they say [clearing his throat], otherwise engaged."



THE DAY OF THE DOCTOR (2013)

In the 50th anniversary special, Baker played the role of 'The Curator' — a future incarnation of The Doctor.

"I met Caroline Skinner when I was doing a commercial, and it was only later that she revealed herself to be the producer of *Doctor Who*! So they asked me, and I agreed to do a scene. Matt Smith [the Eleventh Doctor] was enchanting. On the big day, I was at the ExCeL [for the anniversary convention]. And when the scene was shown, the whole place exploded — it was very moving, very touching indeed."

VARIOUS EPISODES OF TOM BAKER'S RUN ON DOCTOR WHO ARE OUT NOW ON DVD



Nightwing (Loren Lester) joins Harley Quinn (Melissa Rauch) and Batman (Kevin Conroy). Below: Floronic Man (Kevin Michael Richardson) and Poison Ivy (Paget Brewster).

STILL BATS AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

Kevin Conroy, the voice of Batman, on his 25th anniversary

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

KEVIN CONROY RECENTLY had an unusual experience whilst out walking in New York. "A cop car put its siren on as I was crossing the street," recalls the actor. "I thought, 'Oh man, am I going to get a jaywalking ticket?' Then a cop leans out the window and goes, 'We want a picture of Batman! Come on, Batman!' Did I do the voice?" He breaks into a booming baritone. "'Please, officer, don't give me a ticket!'"

Conroy has been doing that voice for 25 years, playing Bruce Wayne and his vigilante alter-ego first in *Batman: The Animated Series*, then through numerous follow-up shows, video games, and the odd feature-length movie such as the new *Batman And Harley Quinn*. He's played the role for longer than the tenures of Adam West, Michael Keaton, Val Kilmer, George Clooney, Christian Bale and Ben Affleck combined and, for many, his silky smooth version is the definitive take on the Caped Crusader. Yet until recently, most people couldn't have picked him out of a Batline-up. "But because of the internet, everybody now recognises everybody," he says. "Faces are no longer anonymous."

With that face, long and handsome, Conroy could certainly have played the live-action Bat. But it was his voice that was his passport, even



though he freely admits that when he showed up for the audition in 1992, he was virtually clueless about the Caped Crusader. "I was a New York stage actor," he explains. "I only knew the Adam West show. 'Zap! Pow! Bam!' Bruce Timm [co-creator of *The Animated Series*] told me that Batman's parents were murdered in front of him. That changed everything. I approached it as a classic, tragic character and went to the deepest, darkest place I could find in my voice. I've continued to approach it that way."

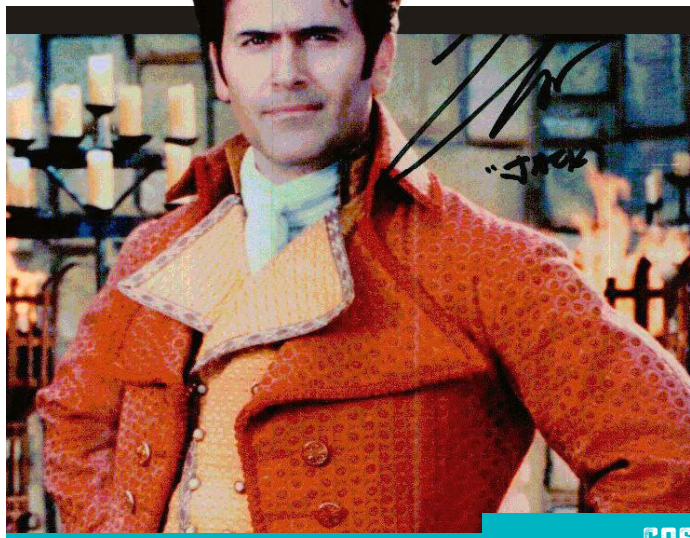
There's no sense that Conroy is ready to hang up his Batmicrophone just yet, even as he enters his early sixties, nor that *Batman And Harley Quinn* is the culmination of his work with Timm. The new movie teams a reluctant Bats with Harley, a character who has become a mighty oak after her humble debut in *The Animated Series*, most recently with her film-stealing appearance in *Suicide Squad*. "They really balance each other well," says Conroy of the pairing which, crucially, still sees Batman come first in the title. "Oh, keep the billing," he laughs. "For now at least..."

BATMAN AND HARLEY QUINN IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

BEST OF TIMES | WORST OF TIMES

BRUCE CAMPBELL

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



COSTUME

I looked like a swashbuckler in *Jack Of All Trades*. It was very dashing and fairly comfortable, except the cape, which was too fucking heavy. They took out half the weight. I said, "I gotta fight in this cape, baby!"



For *Mindwarp*, I played a post-apocalyptic Jeremiah Johnson in a costume made of car parts. My goggles were car heating vents. But I was hitting on the costume designer so I was somewhat distracted.

LOCATION

Sundown: The Vampire In Retreat. About '88 we shot that, in Moab, Utah. I'm a huge fan of the West and it completely made me eat up Utah. It's just spectacular in its desolation and isolation and its solitude. I've since come back multiple times to that town as a civilian because it was such a spectacular location.



The worst was probably Detroit, Michigan, shooting *Crimewave*. I was directing the second unit. We were on a cherrypick bucket up over the Detroit river in the middle of winter and it was 30 degrees below Fahrenheit. Your mouth starts to freeze up so when you start to talk, you sound really drunk, but you're not.

AUDITION

I've gotten three jobs from auditions in my entire life. The first one was *Knots Landing*, playing Michael York's assistant for two episodes. It was 1987 – the first thing I auditioned for in Hollywood. I didn't do TV for another five years because of how horrifying the experience was.

I met with Ed Zwick for *Thirtysomething*. He was mixing a movie while I waited. I came into his office and said, "You should fix [those] cricket sound effects on reel three." My manager said, "Ed Zwick just told me your meeting is the reason he doesn't like to take meetings with actors."

DEATH SCENE

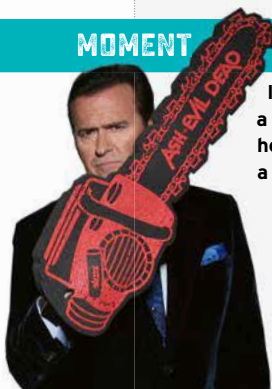
Bubba Ho-Tep. Elvis is lying there, looks up and sees the stars align. It says, "All is well." It was a poignant ending to a ridiculous film. I added a, "Thank you very much." That's how Elvis would die.



I vomited leeches in *Mindwarp*. They were rubber fishing lure leeches with fake blood you had to hold in your mouth without gagging. But I met my wife Ida [on the film], so that worked out.

MOMENT

The premiere of *Ash Vs Evil Dead* in Hollywood. We never had a Hollywood premiere for any of the *Evil Dead* movies. We shut down two blocks of Hollywood Boulevard and Iggy Pop sang for a thousand screaming fans. I was like, "Okay, *Evil Dead*, you've arrived." This shitty little movie that had been made fun of for years had finally got into the Hollywood mainstream. That cracked me up.



I got fired from *Crimewave* and I was cast as the lead. I did a screen test, but because the budget was bigger and it wasn't horror, some studio guy wasn't going to have it. I had to take a secondary role as a slimy heel and watch some other actor [Reed Birney] do the role. That was a shitty experience.

BRUCE CAMPBELL'S BOOK *HAIL TO THE CHIN* IS OUT NOW

BINGEWATCH

The continuing adventures of our marathon man: he's been known to swallow a box set whole

THIS MONTH: AMERICAN HORROR STORY: ROANOKE

WORDS **SIMON CROOK**
ILLUSTRATION **PETER STRAIN**

AFTER GHOSTS, ASYLUMS, witches, freak shows and haunted hotels, the latest season of anthology series *American Horror Story* was hyped by its showrunner Ryan Murphy as a radical rebirth. It sounded like pre-release puff. In some ways, it's business as usual. Keeping with the show's tradition, Season 6 is inspired by true events — in this case, the Roanoke New World colony that mysteriously evaporated in the 1590s. What's rogue is the format: the series unravels as a spot-on *Paranormal Witness* spoof.

To North Carolina then, where married couple Shelby and Matt Miller (Sarah Paulson and Cuba Gooding Jr) are happily settling into their lovely new home that looks as welcoming as an abattoir. When sister-in-law Lee (Angela Bassett) comes to visit, the three fall victim to a relentless supernatural blitzkrieg. Cue narrative ping-pong as the plot bounces between the talking head victims (André Holland, Lily Rabe, Adina Porter) and their re-enacting counterparts. The first episode hits the ground screaming: there's a hot-tub ghost attack, the sky raining teeth and homicidal pig-men (swine-otaur are the show's recurring bogeymen). By episode two, the series' villain emerges from the woods — Kathy Bates' Butcher, a cleaver-wielding Roanoke phantom with a spirit-army of New World zombies.

This is horror played at warp-speed — each episode comes pre-loaded with six jump-scares and three reveals. Just when you think you know where it's heading, the show lobs in psycho ghost nurses or a cannibal clan. It's a bit like watching a campfire ghost story burst into a wildfire but the show does take time to develop its mythology. 'Chapter Four', the Explainer Episode, links its random horrors into a surprisingly coherent pagan legend involving druids, Blood Moons and a human-sacrifice cult. (The show's biggest mystery, Bates' pigeon-through-a-mangle accent, is never explained. Where's she from? Derby? Dublin? Dundee? Dartford? *All of them?*)

The mock-doc style is on-the-nose but ace, the gore splashy but what makes this such a riot are the brash steals: *Amityville*, *Hostel*, *Blair Witch*, *Poltergeist*, and *Texas Chainsaw* and many more are all ransacked. This is jukebox horror, and fabulously brazen. When the Millers abruptly escape with five episodes left, you're wondering: where's there to go?

The solution has my head rotating like an owl on a fidget spinner. In the unreal real world, the show's become such a ratings hit the channel launches a follow-up series. "Like *Big Brother* with scares!" screams the producer as the actors playing the re-enactors and the original victims

are moved into the actual haunted house, hoping to capture the real Roanoke ghouls on camera. In other words, mid-season, the show drops a meta-ton bomb, and it's absolutely nuts. Still, at this point I'm experiencing some weird aural delirium. What *are* those hideous chewing noises? Turns out it's the sound of a show eating itself to death. Having written itself into a corner, there's nowhere to go but headbutt itself against the wall, duplicating the same old scares from a new POV perspective. Cuba Gooding Jr is a self-mocking blast as an ego-puffed actor but the show collapses into a shapeless mess of a hide-and-shriek, cruelly stretched out for four, knackered episodes.

By the time the finale lands, Adina Porter's lone survivor is flung into a true-crime take-off, an *Oprah* parody then a *Ghost Hunters* spoof, meaning we're now inside a show-within-a-show-within-a-show-within-a-show-within-a-show. Head hurting? Mine too, after 10 episodes. If you follow a climax with a climax then another climax, you end up with an anti-climax, which is exactly where the slot-filling epilogue ends up. The ballsy move ends up utter meta-bollocks, but you can't ever accuse the show of playing safe.

**AMERICAN HORROR STORY: ROANOKE IS OUT ON
5 OCTOBER ON DVD AND BLU-RAY**



ALAMY



STORY OF THE SHOT

SHANE

WORDS IAN FREER

IF THE ONLY thing you know about *Shane* is the classic last line — “Shane, come back!” — then you have a treat in store. George Stevens’ 1953 Western is a masterpiece, a profound morality tale exploring the thin lines between good and evil and the consequences of violence. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the film’s touching final moments when mysterious stranger Shane (Alan Ladd), who has become an integral part of the Starrett family life, says goodbye to little Joey (Brandon deWilde) after murdering the bad guys. Off he rides, ignoring little Joey’s cries.

“The line at the end is, ‘There’s no living with a killing,’ like you cannot change the mould of someone,” says Edward Countryman, author of the BFI Film Classics book on *Shane*. “There has been an intervention. The stranger has come in, he has found a disturbed world and intervened in it. He toys with remaining but he cannot stay there. There is no place for him in the settled valley.”

While *Shane* was conceived as a vehicle for Ladd, it was his young co-star deWilde who truly shone, the boy earning an Oscar nomination for his work on the film. Born into a theatrical family, deWilde was an award-winning Broadway actor aged seven (praised by John Gielgud), and Jean Arthur, who played Joey’s mother, was said to have marvelled at deWilde’s ability to keep doing what Stevens asked — ad infinitum. “John Ford shot so you could only edit it one way,” says Countryman. “Well, that was not George Stevens. The man shot and shot and shot and shot and shot. And shot some more just in case.” Shooting the finale, deWilde finally lost his patience. Every time Ladd spoke his lines, deWilde crossed his eyes and stuck out his tongue. Finally, Ladd snapped and called to the boy’s father, “Make that kid stop or I’ll beat him over the head with a brick.” DeWilde quickly fell in line.

The scene’s encapsulation of the troubled lonely hero who must leave played into the likes of *The Searchers* and *Pale Rider* (a virtual remake). The film has also rippled throughout superhero culture, both in light-hearted ways — the ’60s *Batman* TV series featured a villain called Shame in ‘Come Back, Shame’ — and in more substantial ways. Not only does *Shane* play a pivotal role in James Mangold’s *Logan* — Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart) watches it in a hotel room and explains it is almost 100 years old in 2029 — but Laura’s (Dafne Keen) monologue at Logan’s grave is taken word-for-word from the film; a poignant homage to Shane’s long goodbye.

“I am always reminded, through Joey and this film, of one of the most bittersweet facts,” Mangold wrote in an introduction to *Shane* for the Academy Of Motion Picture Arts And Sciences. “That the course of our lives can be profoundly changed by folks who sometimes cannot stay. The temporary nature of some relationships in our lives does not diminish their power, and in fact sometimes enlarges them.”

SHANE IS OUT NOW ON BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

JACKET REQUIRED

Stars Matthew Modine and Vincent D'Onofrio reflect on 30 years of *Full Metal Jacket*

WORDS IAN FREER

BREAK OUT THE Full Metal Cake and get ready to blow out the Full Metal Candles — Stanley Kubrick's Vietnam War masterpiece, *Full Metal Jacket*, has just turned 30. One of the greatest and most profound "war is hell" movies in cinema history, it also launched the careers of two of its stars — Matthew Modine, as the raw and idealistic Private Joker, and Vincent D'Onofrio, tragic and terrifying as the bullied Private Pyle. Here the duo, who knew each other before filming began, reflect on the movie, working with Kubrick, and nearly walking off set.

Do you remember how you got the roles?

Matthew Modine: I was in a restaurant called The Source on Sunset Boulevard having breakfast with an actor, David Alan Grier, and there was a guy sitting about 10 feet away, looking at me saying, "Fuck you, fuck you." David looked over his shoulder and said, "Oh, that's Val Kilmer, he's a really nice guy." So David went over and started talking to him and he got me to come over and say hello. I said, "Hi, my name's Matthew Modine." And he goes, "Yeah, I know who you are. I'm fucking sick of you." I said, "Look, I'm the youngest of seven kids, I've been fighting my whole life; I have no problem going outside if you want to go outside." He said, "I am sick of you because you got *Vision Quest*, *Mrs. Soffel* and *Birdy*, and now you're doing Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*." I said, "I am not going to apologise to you or anyone for the work that I've done. But I can tell you right now I am not doing Stanley Kubrick's film." Of course, when I finished my breakfast, I rushed outside and put 20 quarters



into a payphone to call my manager in New York and asked him to send *Vision Quest* to Stanley Kubrick, and I'd call Alan Parker in London to see if he could send him *Birdy*. How I got the job I still don't know, but Val Kilmer certainly started a fire.

Vincent D'Onofrio: The first time I heard about *Full Metal Jacket* was because of Matthew, and then, of course, Stanley cast me in the role. I've said this to Matthew before and he just brushes it off, but there is a very, very good chance I wouldn't have my career if it wasn't for those two guys.

Modine: I brush it off because you can open the door for anybody but it's the person who walks into the room who gets the job. So I am very happy and honoured that I opened the door, but Vince owns his career.





Far left: Gunnery Sergeant Hartman (R. Lee Ermey) unleashes hell over a jelly doughnut. **Left:** The Marines under fire in Vietnam (actually the Isle Of Dogs in East London).



Born to drill: Private Joker (Matthew Modine) and Private Pyle (Vincent D'Onofrio) on the parade ground.

Full Metal Jacket was the film that started this whole thing of actors going through boot camp. What are your memories of that?

D'Onofrio: It's not the same boot camp you hear about these days where guys go through rigorous amounts of physical stuff. Our boot camp was learning all the things you need to know to look like a Marine. For me, it was learning how to march and putting on weight at the same time, learning how to do Monkey Patrol with the rifles, learning how to take a rifle apart and put it back together blindfolded. There are very specific things about the Marine Corps we had to follow. All of that stuff, when it came to etiquette, and how we behaved, we were taught all that by Lee Ermey.

What are the R. Lee Ermey insults you remember?

Modine: [Shouts] "I BET YOU'RE THE KIND OF GUY THAT WOULD FUCK A PERSON IN THE ASS AND NOT EVEN HAVE THE GODDAMN COMMON COURTESY TO GIVE HIM A REACH-AROUND!"

D'Onofrio: [Laughs] That's one. There are so many. The shouting was fine when Lee hadn't just finished lunch. There were certain days when he'd just drink coffee. If you lend yourself to it, it's really happening. He was amazing in those scenes.

What are your most vivid memories of Kubrick?

Modine: I think Stanley was a different person to each one of us. He was whoever he had to be in that moment, from a technician to an actor and then the different personalities from actor to actor. He was a different person to Vincent than he was to me because there were different requirements. What I took away from Stanley was that he was a Jewish kid from the Bronx who loved making movies. He was passionate about life, loved his family and his animals, and really, *really* loved making movies. I believe he wished he'd made more of them.

D'Onofrio: Stanley was very kind to me. He was never nasty to me about anything. I didn't >

get to know him very well. He invited us over to his house to watch movies. We watched *The Purple Rose Of Cairo* over there. He had these two big projectors and he would change the reels himself. He opened the fridge up and we had these grenade-sized Heinekens we used to drink. He also told me some really personal things, about me and what my career might turn into, that I would never repeat but stuck with me my whole life. I was shocked when he did that. To be frank, there is one particular thing he said to me that absolutely is true about what has happened to my life. He pegged my career in one sentence to me. I looked at him like he was out of his fucking mind. I look back at it today as a 58-year-old man and the long career I've had because of him. And he nailed it perfectly in one sentence. For me, I was blessed to be there and I was treated really well.

What was your experience with Kubrick's endless takes?

Modine: All that preparation he did was all he needed in order to be able to tell a story. There was one story he told about people talking about the number of takes he does — as if it mattered. He said you would never go to Beethoven and say, “Hey, Beethoven, how many notes in that concerto?” Or to Picasso, “How many strokes in that?” He said it was just absurd. The process of making a film is the same kind of exploration into art as a musician or a painter. So why should you consider the number of takes important? What's important is you've found the one you needed in order to tell your story.

D'Onofrio: I never had any problem with it. In the boot camp stuff, there was not one time we did anything different from any other movie. The blanket party scene I did somewhere around nine times and that's normal for a scene like that. It was a long, difficult shot. Did I want to do it nine times? No. But actors are fucking lazy by nature, they never want to do things too much.

Modine: One more thing about the number of takes. When we finished the film, Arliss Howard [who played Private Cowboy] told me he was saying goodbye to Stanley and Stanley asked, “You are going to miss me?” Arliss said, “Of course, I am going to miss you.” And Stanley said, “No. You are going to miss me when you are on another film set because you are going to be doing a scene and the director is going to say, ‘Cut, we got it, let's move on.’ And you are going to know we didn't get it and we shouldn't be moving on and you are going to miss me.”

Matthew, is it true that he didn't let you leave for the birth of your first son?

Modine: No, he did let me go but it took some convincing. It took me threatening to cut my hand and say that I would have to go to the hospital to have my hand stitched up. I think what it was, I started on the wrong foot by saying, “I am not filming today. You are shooting the scene where Eightball [Dorian Harewood] is shot by the sniper and I won't work today.” That was a

Right: Stanley Kubrick calls the shots on the often freezing London set of *Full Metal Jacket*. **Below (top to bottom):** Private Pyle has his famous breakdown in the showers; Private Joker has a close shave.



bad approach: I was accusing him of doing a lot of takes and being slow. He was like, “What are you talking about? We're going to shoot Dorian and then we'll be onto you in the afternoon.”

D'Onofrio: Or four months later...

Modine: So I started off on the wrong foot. My wife and I named our son Boman about five years before he was born. We were joking and said, “We'll have children and when it's a boy we'll call him Boy and when he's older we'll call him Man. And as a teenager we'll call him Boman.” We thought it sounded like a baseball pitcher. [Does announcer's voice] “Now pitching for the New York Yankees — Boman Modine!” But what never occurred to me was Keir Dullea's character in *2001: A Space Odyssey* was Bowman. So I think he thought we were naming our son after Keir Dullea.

What are your memories of living in London during the shoot?

Modine: How bad the food was. It was explained to me by Kubrick's assistant Leon Vitali that England was still paying for World War II. It didn't make sense that you couldn't get good fruit and veg in England with all that grain and good soil. You'd go to buy carrots and they were

like a 90-year-old man's erection.

D'Onofrio: At least they were erect.

What does the film mean to you now?

D'Onofrio: I've only seen it twice. I saw it when it first came out and then we had to do this commentary thing where you talk through the film. It's just an incredible comment on war and the human psyche. I think it's amazing. The reaction I get for the character I played is never-ending. There's not a man or a woman who recognises me for that film who has been in the military who can't help themselves but stop and say something about it. That's been happening for 30 years. So whenever anybody asks me what my favourite film is, many things go through my mind but I can't help but say *Full Metal Jacket* because of the experience I had.

Modine: People have expectations about Stanley Kubrick that are unrealistic when they first see his films. I think this film continues to have relevance because we continue to teach young people to go through military training and then go out and kill people. It is something very primordial and sadly necessary to vanquish people who want to kill us. I think Stanley Kubrick was saying if we continue to use violence to solve our problems, we'll be riding that bomb like Slim Pickens at the end of *Dr. Strangelove*, destroying life as we know it on this planet. We have to learn from the mistakes of our past if we're going to move forward as a conscious society that's achieving the goals of civilisation as we desire.

FULL METAL JACKET IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

THE
EMPIRE
VERDICT

FULL METAL
JACKET

★★★★★
RATED R18+

What we said: “An assault rifle of a movie: cold, steely and precisely made.”

Notable extras:

Commentary featuring Adam Baldwin, Vincent D'Onofrio, R. Lee Ermye and screenwriter/author Jay Cocks and a Modine-centric featurette, *Between Good And Evil*.

MY MOVIE MASTERMIND

JOHN MADDEN

Can the *Miss Sloane* director go it alone?

WORDS IAN FREER



LEADER BOARD

Ben Kingsley	9.5
Christopher Lee	9.5
David O. Russell	9.5
Quentin Tarantino	9.5
Paul W.S. Anderson	9
Werner Herzog	9
Franco Nero	9
Robert Rodriguez	9
Guillermo del Toro	9
Bryan Singer	8.5

1 In *Miss Sloane*, when Schmidt (Mark Strong) says, "Dildos are illegal in Texas but Joe Public can walk into a sports store and walk out with a shotgun", how does Sloane (Jessica Chastain) respond?

She says, "That would explain the low rate of dildo-related murders in Texas."

Correct.

2 In *Shakespeare In Love*, what are the three things Henslowe (Geoffrey Rush) says audiences want?

"Comedy, love and a bit with a dog." That was a challenging film to make. People standing on the sidelines said it could never work. For the Weinsteins, it was about how to get an audience to see a film that had "Shakespeare" in the title. They put the title out to some creative thinking outfits and they came back with some ludicrous ones. 'Romeo, Juliet, Viola And Will' was one of them. They were just stupid.

Correct.

3 By what method did Anthony Hopkins believe that aliens were sending him messages in *Proof*?

I don't remember that one. [Hears the answer] That's an abstruse mathematics question!

The correct answer is in Dewey Decimal codes.

4 At the end of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, Judi Dench's Evelyn says, "Someone once said, 'Everything will be alright in the end. And if it's not alright, then trust me, it's not yet

the end.'" Who is that someone?

Sunny. [Hears the answer] You've really done some research. Technically, I was right within the framework of the movie. I wasn't even aware it came from a Shah Rukh Khan film.

Half a point. The correct answer is Shah Rukh Khan in *Om Shanti Om*.

5 In *Killshot*, what was the name of the corrupt cop played by Johnny Knoxville who got cut out of the movie?

You've stumped me there. Elmore Leonard's long-time researcher told me, "There is an elephant trap in every Leonard story and you'll discover where this one is." We had to reconfigure it quite substantially.

The correct answer is Ferris Britton.

6 You directed radio versions of the *Star Wars* Trilogy for NPR. Who played Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back*?

John Lithgow, a brilliant actor. We did *Star Wars* when *Return Of The Jedi* was still called *Revenge Of The Jedi*. We were right in the midst of it. It was the first time I'd made a radio play when the audience already had the images in their head.

Correct.

7 In *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, how does Captain Corelli (Nicolas Cage) respond when Captain Weber says, "Heil Hitler"?

"Heil Puccini!" I wasn't ready for the maelstrom of criticism when the film came out. I think the audience stubbed their toe on the idea of Nic

Cage's casting but I'm still very proud of the film.

Correct.

8 What is the name of the fictitious town in *Ethan Frome*?

The location is popping into my mind. Oh, God...

The correct answer is Starkfield.

9 Who played Archie Brown in *Mrs Brown*?

Billy Connolly. No, no, no! The brother — Gerard Butler. It was virtually his first film.

Correct.

10 You have directed three actors to Academy Award nominations. Can you name them?

Judi Dench for *Mrs Brown*, and Gwyneth Paltrow and Geoffrey Rush for *Shakespeare In Love*. When Spielberg won Best Director, there was an assumption *Saving Private Ryan* would win. It was incredible when that didn't happen. There was an enormously long pause before Harrison Ford read out what was on the card. When I saw it again, it was not as long as I thought.

Correct.

JOHN MADDEN SCORES 6.5

"Six-and-a-half points out of 10? Gawd blimey, that quiz was really tough."

MISS SLOANE IS OUT NOW ON DOWNLOAD, DVD AND BLU-RAY



THE FIRST-TAKE CLUB

Filling in those filmic blind spots, one person at a time

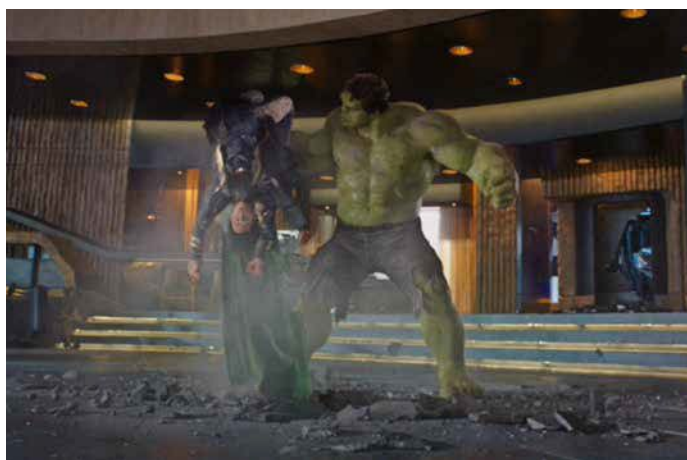
NEIL GIBBONS ON
THE AVENGERS

THIS MONTH'S FIRST-Take Club inductee is Neil Gibbons, screenwriter and the man who, along with his brother Rob, has breathed life into the second phase of Alan Partridge, across film (*Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa*), TV (*Mid-Morning Matters*), and the printed page (*Nomad*). He's been far too busy, presumably, to watch the film *Empire* readers voted the 16th greatest of all time in 2014, so we assembled *The Avengers* for him. And...?

The Avengers, aka *Avengers Assemble* — also known in my house as 'Avengers Congregate', 'Avengers Muster' or 'Avengers Coffee Morning' — isn't a film I've struggled to avoid.

I have a blanket rule to avoid any and all

superhero movies. First, to spite my university flatmate Simon Bather, a man who adored comics even more than he loved pissing in the kitchen sink (ie, a lot), but who I've not seen or spoken to for 19 years. And second, because there are too many of them. Studios — like Partridge pitching Norfolk-set detective series 'Swallow' — argue that 'people like them, so let's make more of them'. But there's only so much budget to go round. Every dollar spent on another comic-book film is a dollar not spent on a new idea: a *Back To The Future*, a *Groundhog Day*. Buying a ticket to the latest *X-Men* sends a message to a film studio that says, "Don't finance something new, finance 'Thor 6' instead." Not for me.



But *Empire* readers have voted it the 16th best film ever made, it's well-reviewed, it has a cast of brilliant actors plus Tom Hiddleston. Who knows? Maybe I will enjoy this film.

I did not enjoy this film.

The avenging started about an hour in and made me wish I could watch more assembling — an hour of interminable, WWE fight sequences, with weirdly harm-free consequences. The combatants take it in turns to lamp each other, flinging opponents into a tree or bus or whatever, at which point they get up again, inconvenienced not by agonising back pain or a popped eye, but by having to walk 20 yards to return to the fray.

And that's my issue with it. The filter through which every creative decision was made

seems to be, "Wouldn't it be cool if...?" It's painfully cool. Tony Stark has designed robotic arms to remove his Iron Man suit as he walks. Of course he has. Standing still is for losers!

The superheroes I can get on board with are the likes of *Kick-Ass* or *The Greatest American Hero*: skin-of-their-teeth, how-does-this-work-again reluctant chancers. But the Avengers are manicured, sharply dressed, have ripped torsos, wise cracks, steeled jaws. No-one is apprehensive or afraid or inept. Everyone is ept. I know, they have to be. They're superheroes. But their supersness means nothing seems super to them. They're freaks who never freak out. Instead of screaming about what the holy Christ they're doing, they exchange snappy but professional

barbs like a team on *The Apprentice* arguing about what name to choose.

Still, at least they knew what was happening. The film assumed a level of knowledge I did not, and still don't, have. I spent the first half-hour consulting Wikipedia every time a new character was introduced and still struggled to orientate myself. Is it sci-fi or fantasy? Science or magic?

Maybe it's just me. Twelve-year-olds get it. *Eight-years-olds* get it. It's snappily written, well shot, with a great cast (plus Tom Hiddleston) but — and I'm braced for the inevitable *Empire* readers' fatwa here — it wasn't for me. Soz.

THE AVENGERS IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

TOP OF THE PILE

Star Michael Palin on *A Fish Called Wanda's* unlikely hero, Ken Pile

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

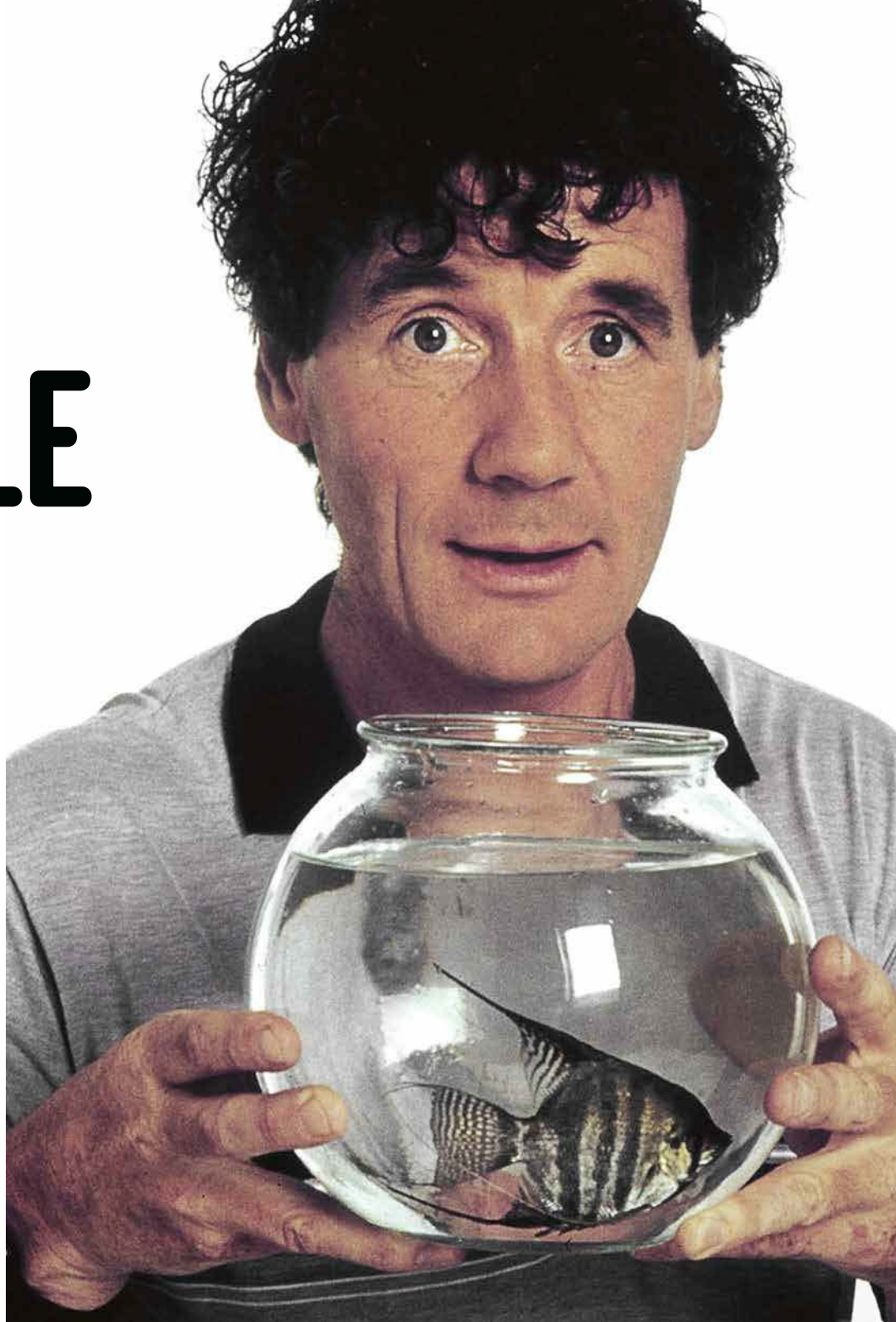
MICHAEL PALIN HAS two BAFTA awards on display in his office at his London home. Well, “slightly concealed”, says the ever-bashful former Python. One marks an Academy Fellowship, awarded to him in 2013 for his TV work. The other is testament to perhaps his single greatest performance, as the stammering, lovelorn Ken Pile in John Cleese’s classic comedy *A Fish Called Wanda*, for which Palin won Best Supporting Actor in 1989. “I’m not sure which one is the *Wanda* one,” reveals Palin. “I think it’s the one that needs polishing.” With the movie about to turn 30, he told us how he approached playing the film’s secret weapon.

THE BEGINNING

“John and I met up fairly regularly between other work,” says Palin of *Wanda’s* writer/star, and fellow Python. The duo had just finished working together on *Monty Python’s The Meaning Of Life* when Cleese casually mentioned he was writing a comedy (then called *A Goldfish Called Wanda*). “He was very interested in having a character who stammered,” recalls Palin. “He knew my father had a stammer and John, with his penchant for research, felt he should talk to me about how a stammer might be played, so he could get it right. He said, ‘I’m going to write this part and you’re the obvious person to play it.’”

THE STAMMER

Palin’s father, Edward, who died in 1977, was afflicted with a terrible stammer, but Palin gently dismisses a suggestion that he played Ken as some sort of tribute. “I don’t think I did,” he says. “I don’t know if I would have taken on the part if my father had still been alive, to be honest. I’ve often thought about this, and I think it probably would have been a bit difficult for me.” Palin took the role on one condition: that Ken’s stammer, while often used for comedic effect, would not completely define the character. “There’s a fierceness and a strength in Ken which makes him more than just the butt of jokes. I didn’t want him to be that at all.”



THE LOOK

Working closely with Hazel Pethig, who had been the Pythons’ costume designer from the off, Palin developed Ken’s distinctive look, from “slightly tight trousers which were a little too short” to a wondrous perm. “We did a few tests where I curled my hair,” says Palin. “Every time, steam was rising from my head. My hair was burning! So I went to a hairdresser and he gave me this dreadful perm. I think it shocked John, but then it made him laugh.” Palin’s decision meant he had to sport the hairdo in real life throughout the film’s eight-week shoot. “My marriage nearly broke up,” he jokes. “I had to sit very far away from my wife on the other side of the bed.”



MAN ON
TRAINSaluting the
scene stealersTHIS MONTH:
ANGRY MAN, THE BELKO
EXPERIMENT

"I COULD DIE tomorrow and be completely happy," smiles c, "having been killed on screen by John C. McGinley." Well, as John Lennon once sang, whatever gets you through the night.

Fria is just one of the many to come to a sticky end in *The Belko Experiment*, James Gunn's horror-thriller where employees are locked into an office building and forced to kill each other. His might be the stickiest, hacked to death by McGinley's Wendell Dukes. "It was a wild day," he recalls. "I was covered in an immense amount of blood for 16 hours. When he attacked me, I wore a pad made of magazines. It was a real cleaver! The sensation was dulled, but I felt it."

The character was initially known as Angry Man, then Tyson Moon after a throwaway reference in the script that never got changed. But when Fria showed up on the film's Bogotá set, he was given a different name altogether. "Robert Hickman," he says. "I still have my little Belko nametag with that on it."

Fria has known Gunn since the '90s, popping up in *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2* as a Ravager. They bonded in unusual circumstances. "During a writer's strike, James was doing an online series, *PG Porn*. The idea was to pair up famous porn stars with known actors in scenes that depicted what happens before the sex. I had a blast, and that's how our working relationship began."

Fria has nothing but fond memories of the Colombian experience. "It was like summer camp," he says. "The stories of our drinking nights are legendary!" Save those for *The Belko Experiment 2*.

THE BELKO EXPERIMENT IS IN CINEMAS
NOW

THE KISS

"A very pleasant form of acting," is how Palin describes the scene where Ken is kissed by Jamie Lee Curtis' Wanda, in his bestselling diaries, *Halfway To Hollywood*. "It was the single greatest kiss in my movie career, but there's not much competition!" he laughs. The scene was shot twice, once at the beginning of filming and again at the end as a reshoot, although Palin insists it had nothing to do with him. "I don't think I had that much influence!" The idea that the kiss unlocks Ken, who briefly loses his stammer in the aftermath, came from Curtis. "She's very sharp," says Palin of his co-star. "It was a very nice scene in which you realise that underneath it all, this man wants a bit of love."

THE INTERROGATION

Ken's signature scene sees him suffer at the hands of Otto (Kevin Kline), who tortures him for information ("It's a chip up the nose!"), while eating Ken's beloved pet fish. If it looks uncomfortable for Palin, tied to a chair throughout, that's because it was. "It was okay, I knew there was great comic potential," he says. "At one point Kevin shoves an apple in my mouth, which wasn't in the script. So I could barely breathe, but people screamed with laughter." The chips up the nose didn't help, either. "You try to put French fries up your nose and retain them for three hours. It can't be done." The proposed solutions — chips with rough edges, plenty of Vaseline — removed the skin from inside Palin's proboscis. In the end, "the only way I could do it was by enormous feats of nasal muscular retention." Don't ask where the ketchup went.

THE AFTERMATH

While Ken's stammer led to some criticism, it was largely accepted within the stammering community, and had an unexpected boon. "I became involved with a group of people who were trying to start up a place for therapy for stammering children," says Palin. That eventually became The Michael Palin Centre For Stammering Children, still based in Clerkenwell, London. "That was the very good side of it, where I felt I'd done my dad proud."

A FISH CALLED WANDA IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY
AND DOWNLOAD

THE
EMPIRE
VERDICT

A FISH
CALLED
WANDA
★★★★★
RATED M

What we said: "Mixing acerbic Pythonesque humour, a sweet romcom touch and wonderful comic performances, this may be the finest hour for any former Python."

Notable extras: Cleese commentary, 1988 documentary, featurettes, trailer and more.

Clockwise from left:
Palin's petty thug Ken
Pile is bowled over by
his piscine passion;
Cleese's Archie Leach
in the grip of con artist
Wanda Gershwitz
(Jamie Lee Curtis);
Madness sets in as Ken
attempts to kill Eileen
Coady; Wanda's
boyfriend Otto (Kevin
Kline) and his unique
chip torture; Wanda,
Ken and Otto are joined
by barrister Archie
Leach — Wanda writer
John Cleese.



Q&A

STEPHEN CURRY

The Aussie actor on going nasty and playing a serial killer in the critically acclaimed Australian thriller *Hounds Of Love*

WORDS JAMES JENNINGS

I watched *Hounds Of Love* last night. It's a very difficult movie to get through! It's very intense.

[Laughs] Are you okay?

Not really! It's a wonderfully made film featuring superb performances, but the movie fries your nerves a bit.

It does, doesn't it? [Director/writer] Ben Young has a ridiculous talent about him, not least of which is creating suspense. Because so much of the film is contained in the one house, it's a real art form in maintaining that suspense and I think he did such an incredible job with that. There are some scenes where you forget to breathe, really.

Did you find it difficult to watch the first time you viewed it?

Yeah I did. Ben wanted us to keep at the forefront of our mind that this stuff happens to real people, and as such you don't want to be involved in a film like this if it's no good. Something that's voyeuristic or melodramatic or hammy — if it sold the subject matter short in any fashion it would've been really disappointing. So the subject matter is quite horrific, so it was a hard watch, but ultimately a very rewarding one — I was speechless at the end because I think it's such an incredible piece of filmmaking and such an assured debut. The whole cast — Emma Booth, Ashleigh Cummings, Susie Porter — everyone is so moving and so committed to the film and it makes for really incredible cinema.

Most of the film is Emma, Ashleigh and you bouncing off each other in a very confined space. Was that quite intense?

We all supported each other, which made it easier. There's that thing where people say if you're playing a captor you should spend time apart off-screen from your victim — I don't buy that. We wanted to make sure from the offset that Ashleigh was comfortable and happy because some pretty horrific stuff happens to her character and that's what made it easier, the fact that there was 100 per cent support and time and care for each other.

This is by the far the nastiest character you've played. Was it difficult to go into and come out of the headspace of a killer?

It's hard to shake it off. The fact that I've got kids made it even harder. I was on the other side of the country from my wife and my boys during filming, and I felt a real need to protect them while we were shooting it. But it comes back to what Ben said at the start — this happens to real people and we have to respect that and that made it very important for us to make it the right way.

Did you research real-life murder cases?

Yeah. Ben and I spoke about a bunch. This is inspired by about seven or eight husband and wife couples, which is frightening in that it's so prevalent. Ben was fascinated by the psychology of it and this film is about that psychology of

co-dependence. So I read about these cases and it was morbidly fascinating to find the similarities. They're invariably a psychopathic male who finds a woman who's like a bird with a broken wing and he takes her under his wing and builds her up and creates her into someone who can forgo any sense of morality in order to keep her husband happy. It's so confronting an idea, and the fact it's a pattern between some couples is frightening. I admire Ben's skill in keeping all of the physical violence off-screen and to still be able to create that sense of tension and horror.

You sport a pretty impressive mo' in the film...

Yeah, I've been accused of letting the mo' do 80 per cent of the work. I'd grown a beard and Ben said, "What about a big dirty mo'?" But I didn't want to play a moustache-twirler bad guy. Then Ben said, "Take a look at these photos from the '80s", and any time there was a sports teacher, a Justice of the Peace, a bank manager, a guy who runs the milk bar — all of these people who had respected positions in the community all sported these slugs [laughs]. For some reason at some stage it turned into something weirdos wear after it being something that all of our sporting heroes used to have. It was a symbol of goodness, a symbol of trust [laughs].

HOUNDS OF LOVE IS OUT 4 OCTOBER ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD



THE
EMPIRE
VERDICT

HOUNDS
OF LOVE

★★★★

RATED MA15+

What we said:

"Deliberately uncomfortable viewing, *Hounds Of Love* is nevertheless a compelling exercise in gritty psycho-noir with outstanding performances and real dramatic weight. Director Ben Young is a name to watch."



NARCOS: SEASON 3



NETFLIX
OUT NOW
EPISODES VIEWED 5

SHOWRUNNER Eric Newman

CAST Pedro Pascal, Damián Alcázar, Francisco Denis, Alberto Ammann, Pepe Rapazote, Matias Varela

PLOT Following the death of its leader Pablo Escobar, the reign of the Medellín Cartel has come to an end, with the Cali Cartel rising to take his place. DEA agents begin work trying to take it down, but soon discover the magnitude of the task in front of them.

“PABLO DIES” ANNOUNCED the pre-release publicity for *Narcos* Season 2, signalling the end for Pablo Escobar was nigh. And so he did. He had to — he died in real life, and there’s very little to be done in terms of writing around that. Which makes Season 3 a soft reset — some characters remain, most notably Pedro Pascal’s DEA agent Javier Peña who takes over voiceover duties, but it’s conceivable (if you concentrated *really* hard) that you could skip the first two seasons and start here.

With its leader shot through the head, the Medellín Cartel is no more, but the cocaine trade didn’t stop, and neither did the United States’ ill-fated War On Drugs. The Medellín’s place was simply taken by another group — the Cali Cartel. With four men at its head — brothers Gilberto (Alcazar) and Miguel (Denis) Rodriguez, Pacho Herrera (Ammann) and their man in New York, Chepe Londono (Rapazote) — the Cali are a different proposition. Where Pablo was fire, these men are ice. Pablo would kill then use the bodies as theatrical warnings not to cross him; the Cali simply wrap their victims in razor wire, throw them into the Cauca river, and let the barbs rip them to pieces as they bloat. The fish will do the rest.

But most importantly, the Cali Cartel has spent time and money integrating itself into Colombia’s administrative infrastructure. This means calls from the US embassy are monitored, informants are picked up as they gather evidence and undercover agents are splashed across the front pages of the papers. The DEA is hamstrung, its investigation initially struggling to get off the ground. And there’s a deadline. The Cali Cartel is pulling a Michael Corleone — they’ve struck a deal, the aim being they’ll be legitimate businessmen within six months. After that, they can’t be touched.

More than ever it’s an ensemble piece but there are two characters who stand out — one on each side of the law. Pascal as Agent Peña is a compelling presence, effortlessly taking on lead good-guy duties as he attempts to navigate the bureaucracy the cartel has put in his way. And then there’s new character Jorge Salcedo (Varela), the Cali’s head of security. He wants out to start his own (legitimate) business, but he’s asked to stick around (*told* to, in effect — cartels don’t tend to give people options) until the illegal activity is wrapped up. He has a wife pulling him one way, potential business partners he needs to keep happy, the DEA to keep at bay and a member of the cartel who, feeling slighted, wants to sabotage his attempts to go straight. It’s a similar balancing act to the one Tony Soprano had to manage — the spinning plates threatening to come crashing down at any moment.

Rewarding and intricately plotted, this latest season balances its drama with set-pieces of excruciating tension (Salcedo hiding evidence during a raid stands out) while doling out just enough information to allow you to follow the complex world of the ’90s cocaine trade without it becoming a history lesson. It remains one of the finest shows on TV. **JONATHAN PILE**

VERDICT Continuing after the death of a main character, especially one as charismatic as Pablo Escobar, is hardly an easy task, but the writers have managed it without breaking sweat. Pablo is dead, long live *Narcos*.



THE MIST



NETFLIX / OUT NOW / EPISODES VIEWED 8

DIRECTOR Christian Torpe

CAST Alyssa Sutherland, Gus Birnery, Luke Cosgrove, Holly Deveaux, Okezie Moro

DRAWN FROM STEPHEN King’s 1980 novella, this grisly adaptation sees the town of Bridgeville, Maine, smothered by an impenetrable fog, one populated by a menagerie of carnivorous hellbeasts. The episodes flit between clutches of holed-up survivors as they bicker, fall out and get violently eviscerated. However, there’s scant in the way of an overarching narrative, with hoary subplots (jock date-rapist, doomsaying priest, shady out-of-towner) and liberal gore no substitute for actual scares. Not close to the power of Frank Darabont’s 2007 movie and borrowing little from King’s original story, this *Mist*’s only real connection to its superior forbears is inclement weather. **JD**



THE TICK



AMAZON PRIME VIDEO / OUT NOW

EPISODES VIEWED 2

DIRECTOR Ben Edlund

CAST Peter Serafinowicz, Griffin Newman, Valorie Curry

WITH HIS GOOFY blue outfit and an irrepressible optimism that borders on psychotic, *The Tick* is among the most joyful superheroes to ever romp across a comic cell. With that in mind, it’s hard to grasp why Amazon’s reboot of the character anchors his manic antics in such a sombre reality. Unlike the ’90s animation (or Patrick Warburton’s short-lived 2001 incarnation), *The Tick* feels unnecessarily doleful, Peter Serafinowicz’s larger-than-life proclamations forced and incongruous against a backdrop of violence and explicit mental illness. Directed by veteran DP Wally Pfister, this is light on both fun and relevance, the character’s superhero satire woefully tired in 2017. **JD**



HOUSE OF CARDS S5

★★★★★

2016 / RATED MA15+ / CREATED BY BEAU WILLIMON /
CAST KEVIN SPACEY, ROBIN WRIGHT, MICHAEL KELLY,
BORIS MCGIVER, JAYNE ATKINSON, DEREK CECIL,
PAUL SPARKS, NEVE CAMPBELL, JOEL KINNAMAN

DVD BR

Coming up Trump



HOUSE OF CARDS has never existed in a bubble. There have always been glances at real-world politics, such as the very Putin-y Russian president Petrov or the terror network ICO, which is just ISIS with different letters. It's often just served as a more absurdist version of what's happening today. Where, then, does it go now? We have Trump in the White House, a man whose propensity for political calamity might see him considered "a bit OTT" if he were fictional, and in his trail a slime of corruption, Russian sneakery, war with the press, nepotism, the firing of anyone 'disloyal', and nuclear war flirtation. What has he left for the scriptwriters? Civil war? Secret lizard people? *House Of Cards* now risks either becoming ridiculous if it tries to outdo real life or sedate if it doesn't. It opts mostly to go high where Trump goes low, keeping the crazy-twist count small,

with the odd lurch in the other direction. It's probably entirely the correct choice.

The series stumbled in Season 3, seemingly unsure of what to do with Frank and Claire Underwood (Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright) once they'd grabbed the most powerful office in the world, but made hay in Season 4 by turning their lives into a desperate game of *Risk*. They were assaulted on all fronts by people keen to relieve them of their power, forcing them into more and more risky methods to fend them off. That only gets worse this season.

We open with an election looming. Frank, conscious of his dwindling popularity, is trying to stir up fear over the threat of ICO. If he can terrify the electorate and convince them he can save them, the presidency could remain his. Opposing him is Will Conway (Joel Kinnaman), the anti-Frank. Wholesome, naive, open (mostly). Add to the mix the fact Claire, nominee for Vice President, is more popular than her husband and you have the potential for a spectacular battle, which the season fully exploits. If there's a key word for the season it's "pressure". How each character deals with the strain of the election is surprising and darkly delightful. Some crack, others harden, and not necessarily the ones you'd suspect. The series' big pull from reality is the grubbiness of the presidential campaign. Each time Frank, Claire or Will try to usurp the other it's not by using policy or anything of substance, but by dredging up embarrassing, ultimately inconsequential scandal. Politics' slide into the gutter is a boon to *House Of Cards*.

This has never really been a show about politics. None of its players wants to be in charge in order to improve things for anyone but themselves. Policy is rarely mentioned, the public virtually unseen. Power is simply a status symbol to be possessed, to grab and lock behind glass, away from the sticky fingers



Above: Frank and Claire (Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright). Here: Frank and White House CoS Doug Stamper (Michael Kelly).

of others. The presidency is the One Ring and all the main players are Gollum, fixated on a treasure that can never be theirs to keep. What maintains *House Of Cards* is adding new players to the game and this season we've a pair of doozies. Patricia Clarkson is Jane Davis, an ICO expert who knows everyone and never forgets anything. Her scatty, chummy exterior is clearly a front. Campbell Scott is political advisor Mark Usher, of whom Frank says, "You always know where he stands. Usually on someone's neck." You can rely on Clarkson and Scott with any material, but they're given gold here, each fully a match for the deviousness of the Underwoods.

This show is always at its best when people are trying to outwit each other, which is why later episodes in this season are a little disappointing for relying on easy outs. There's some nonsense about webcam hacking that relies on people talking to themselves about their darkest secrets while sitting at their computers, and more turns to violence, always a disappointingly blunt last resort for this show. Those are blips, though. The show gives no impression that it's running out of ideas. It keeps discovering new rules to the game, and new ways for its characters to cheat them. The fictional central relationship is showing serious strain, but its potential for creating addictively dark drama is not. One of the show's best seasons. **OLLY RICHARDS**

HOUSE OF CARDS SEASON 5 IS OUT 5 OCTOBER ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



This was no teddy bears' picnic.

IT COMES AT NIGHT



OUT 4 OCTOBER
RATED MA15+ / 87 MINS

DIRECTOR Trey Edward Shults **DVD BR**

CAST Joel Edgerton, Christopher Abbott, Carmen Ejogo, Kelvin Harrison Jr, Riley Keough

PLOT In an America depopulated by a virulent disease, survivalist Paul (Edgerton) lives in a remote home with wife Sarah (Ejogo) and son Travis (Harrison Jr). When Will (Abbott), a stranger, breaks in, Paul accepts him, his wife Kim (Keough) and young child into the household.



AFTER THE APOCALYPSE, movie characters have a hard choice to make: take to the road — as in *Mad Max 2* or *The Road* — or hole up in a fortified enclave, as here. Neither option is ideal, and the collapse of society always means strangers aren't to be trusted — but, then again, neither are close family members, or pets.

It Comes At Night is low-key, and yet also suspenseful. The approach is so calm and quiet that you find yourself straining to hear every suggestive creak on the soundtrack or spotting an omen in the background. Is that a tree or a twisted human figure in the mid-distance as the protagonist drives through the woods? Was that tiny inconsistency in a stranger's account of life before the crisis an honest slip or a crack in a sinister cover story?

By not going into the details of the outbreak that has wiped out most of humanity, *It Comes At Night* plays more as a horror film than a science-fiction one. What exactly is the "it" of the title? The blood-borne plague? Paranoia? Something worse? The depiction of hardscrabble life amid threatening woods evokes the historical horror of *The Witch*, while the focus on the extreme, not-always-popular measures taken by the patriarch to ensure the survival of his tight-knit family group suggests a less melodramatic take on *10 Cloverfield Lane* — though the ruthless middle-class father has been a recurrent figure in apocalypse cinema since Ray Milland shot beatniks after the bomb fell in 1962's *Panic In Year Zero!*. The usual question that arises is whether the regimented, paranoid, isolated life that can be maintained by shooting at passing strangers or euthanising (and incinerating) ailing relatives is worth surviving for.

While Joel Edgerton's preparedness advocate Paul — with his double locks, polythene wall-hangings, battery lamps, gas masks, freshwater stockpile and strict rules of conduct — isn't the monster John Goodman played in *10 Cloverfield Lane*, there's a sense that he takes grim satisfaction in the way the end of the world puts him in a position of absolute power in his home. Edgerton, who also produced, gives one of his best performances here without being at all showy. Everyone else has to play off him — and be wary of his character. Though Paul can introduce quarantine measures, he can't stop his nearly grown son (Harrison Jr, in a potential breakout turn) from suffering gruesome nightmares — or consider what the sight of the stranger's young wife (Keough) will stir in the isolated adolescent.

Writer-director Trey Edward Shults made the indie relationships drama *Krisha* — cast mostly with his own family — and carries his interest in the tensions within a close-knit group over to *It Comes At Night*. It's not a film built on spectacle. Instead, it homes in on the stresses of getting by, day to day, in a world where trust feels unlikely. Or even impossible. **KIM NEWMAN**

VERDICT Full of character-based suspense, it's dramatic and ramped-up with tension. Existing between a Sundance and a FrightFest film, this is a challenging, horribly plausible future vision.



SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING



OUT 18 OCTOBER
RATED M / 133 MINS

DIRECTOR Jon Watts



CAST Tom Holland, Michael Keaton, Jon Favreau, Zendaya, Donald Glover, Tyne Daly, Marisa Tomei, Robert Downey Jr, Jacob Batalon

PLOT After the euphoria of his airport tussle with the Avengers, Peter Parker (Holland) returns to his mundane New York life. He craves excitement – and when he crosses paths with arms dealer the Vulture (Keaton), he gets it.



IN THE LATE 1980s, Marvel began a run of comic books called *Damage Control*, about the underpaid, overworked schmoes charged with cleaning up the mess made by superhero battles. This

series is relevant to *Spider-Man: Homecoming* for two reasons. Firstly, it inspired the movie's villain, flying crook the Vulture (Michael Keaton), who starts out as a blue-collar construction guy sifting through the rubble left behind at the end of *The Avengers*. Secondly, and more crucially, it seems to have set the vibe for the first Spider-film made with Marvel's direct creative input. This Peter Parker is perpetually on the fringes of something more exciting — less a noble lad discovering his inner hero than a dweeby kid desperate to get into the party around the corner. And, ditching the angst and sludgy plotting of the last few films, *Homecoming* is easily the best Spider-Man film since Sam Raimi's operatic *Spider-Man 2*.

In no small part this is due to it starring the best screen Spider-Man so far. Nimble and shrimpy (though weirdly buff once he removes his shirt), Tom Holland's Parker is hugely endearing from his first scene, shooting a video diary of the airport fight from *Captain America: Civil War* on his phone. He's barely in control of his powers and appealingly lame. One scene in which he turns up at a party hoping to hook up with cool classmate Liz (Laura Harrier) feels like a superhero *Superbad*: it's a refreshing spin on the comic-book-movie template, and nice to have

a film this big not afraid to frequently keep things small.

The director, Jon Watts, is making the leap from a small film himself: 2015's nifty thriller *Cop Car*. The lightness of touch he demonstrated there is here in spades, with a genius *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* joke and even the big action sequences (the standout being a Washington Monument rescue) peppered with sharp gags. The performances he gets out of the young cast are sweet and sparky. And just as *Cop Car* pitted kids against an adult evildoer in Kevin Bacon's corrupt lawman, Watts works the same dynamic here, as Peter butts heads with the intimidating Adrian Toomes, aka the Vulture.

This winged bastard, complete with a furry-collared bomber jacket making him look at least a little vulture-esque, is far from Marvel's most interesting villain, though it's nice to have a baddie who's just out to make some cash rather than drop cities on people's heads. Despite Keaton's best efforts, and being described by another character as "a psychopath dressed like a demon", the human bird of prey is only mildly compelling, and the duke-it-out, CGI-heavy action finale between him and Parker drags somewhat. But the Vulture does provide the



Tom Holland's precocious young Spidey shows off his best moves.

movie with some cool sci-fi trimmings: Toomes has adapted the Chitauri alien tech he's found into a variety of amazing weapons. Fortunately, Peter has his own new tech, courtesy of a suit (two words: web grenades) gifted to him by his Avengers mentor Tony Stark.

Much has been made of the injection of MCU characters into Spider-Man's until-now hermetically sealed world. The makers of *Homecoming* had a tricky tightrope to walk: over-Marvel the pudding and it becomes another Avengers movie, but underdo it and it's just another Spidey reboot. The balance is pretty much spot-on, with the familiar faces treated as sprinkles on the ice cream sundae. Robert Downey Jr literally phones in most of his performance, but in the best possible way. And there is a recurring cameo from another superhero which gets progressively funnier as the film goes on. Peter Parker geeks out every time one of them swings into a scene. It's likely you will, too. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT The characters and scenarios are familiar, but this is a loose, cool, funny remix that makes them feel fresh again. Plus, it's mercifully short on life lessons from Aunt May.



TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT



OUT 4 OCTOBER
RATED M / 149 MINS

DIRECTOR Michael Bay



CAST Mark Wahlberg, Josh Duhamel, Stanley Tucci, Isabella Moner, Laura Haddock, Anthony Hopkins

PLOT The war between Transformers and the TRF (Transformers Reaction Force) is raging. In a last-ditch effort to save humanity, inventor Cade Yeager (Wahlberg) and Bumblebee join forces with an English earl (Hopkins) and Oxford professor (Haddock).



BELIEVE IT OR

not, *Transformers*, in its live-action movie iteration, is 10 years old. For its first hour at least, there was something human, relatable and — whisper it — charming in Michael Bay's original, a boy (Shia LaBeouf) who loved his car (Bumblebee) and wanted the unattainable girl (Megan Fox). Now, fifth time out, the knack of coming up with anything so simple and likeable has eluded Bay. As in *Revenge Of The Fallen*, *Dark Of The Moon* and *Age Of Extinction*, *The Last Knight* is bogged down in backstory, lacks a real feel for its characters and still can't find a way to make its robot-on-robot action exhilarating.

The first project to emerge from the *Transformers* writers room, *The Last Knight* starts well in the Dark Ages. After fireballs wittily fly over the Paramount mountain, Bay mounts a full-on Arthurian battle far more exciting than Guy Ritchie's, featuring trebuchets, knights blasted sky-high into the air and a three-headed mechanical dragon. This prologue gives rise to the MacGuffin, a talisman that will lead you to the staff that gives you ultimate power in the universe. Of course, the talisman quickly falls into the

hands of inventor/Autobot sympathiser Cade Yeager (Wahlberg) who has saved Isabella (Moner), a Rey-From-*The Force Awakens*-like who fixes things alongside BB-8-alike robot Sqweeks and now hides out in a junkyard.

The plot, as it is, sees various parties hunt Yeager to find the talisman: the hardnut military TRF, Decepticons, Optimus Prime — who goes rogue after a visit to Cybertron — and Anthony Hopkins as batshit-crazy earl Sir Edmund Burton, keeper of Transformers lore, who whisks Cade and Bumblebee to England (you'll note Isabella has been forgotten about). Here, Cade is introduced to Laura Haddock's polo-playing Professor of Seemingly Everything at Oxford University, Vivian Wembley, who turns out to be a descendant of a society of luminaries who have worked over the ages to keep the transformers a secret on Earth: other members include (spot the odd one out) Shakespeare, Mozart, Einstein and Sam Witwicky.

If you are playing Transformers Bingo, you can tick off military porn, tin-eared exposition, Josh Duhamel as Colonel Thingamy, one-dimensional characters, painful banter, John Turturro as Agent Whatsisname, sunsets, slow-mo every other shot and a bombastic score. The comedy robot duties this time are carried by Burton's sociopathic butler Cogman (voiced by *Downton*'s Jim Carter) who is brazenly described as a "C-3P0 rip-off" and quickly grates.

This is reputedly Bay's (as a director at least) last go-round on the series. Few filmmakers work harder to entertain, throwing in drone chases, car chases, submarine shenanigans as well as robo-action, all before a third-act climax at Stonehenge. ILM's work remains peerless — Bumblebee re-piecing himself back together again is immaculate — but the effect is often deadening. It is amazing how a series with so much nostalgic goodwill, technical finesse and behind-the-scenes talent has led so often to experiences that are so joyless. Bay has many talents; smart, sharp bouncy summer fun isn't one of them. **IAN FREER**

VERDICT Bay's determination to give you a good time doesn't result in fun. Overlong, overstuffed and soulless, for fans who grew up with Optimus, *The Last Knight* will sting like a bee.



THE HOUSE



OUT 4 OCTOBER
CERT MA15+ / 88 MINS

DIRECTOR Andrew Jay Cohen



CAST Will Ferrell, Amy Poehler, Jason Mantzoukas

PLOT As they prepare to send their daughter to college, Scott (Ferrell) and Kate (Poehler) suddenly have their scholarship offer revoked. Accordingly, they set up an illegal casino in the suburbs.



IT'S FAIR TO say that the fratty, improvisational brand of comedy minted by Will Ferrell and co — and popularised by the Apatow crowd — doesn't necessarily seem built to age with its audience. But fast-rising writing duo Brendan O'Brien and Andrew Jay Cohen seem to have found a way to wring gently subversive, childish laughs from purportedly mundane adult situations. First came the bong-hitting generational mash-up of the *Bad Neighbours* films and now we get *The House*: a likeable, if occasionally strained, comedy about a pair of misbehaving empty nesters.

Yes, it occasionally feels like a remixed version of some of its stars' other hits — there's a healthy dash of *Old School*'s juxtaposed suburban mayhem, for starters — but it mostly turns these echoes into a virtue, nailing a relaxed, daft mix of crime and comedy that, as we've learned from the *Baywatch* reboot, isn't nearly as easy as it looks.

It also helps that the script (written by both O'Brien and Cohen and solely directed by the latter) has a silly, graspable simplicity. Will Ferrell and Amy Poehler play Scott and Kate Johansen, buttoned-up parents facing up to the fact that Alex, their only daughter, is about to head to college. Just as they grapple with this new freedom ("Get your passport ready," mumbles Scott uncertainly, "because we're going

to Fucktown"), Bob (Nick Kroll), the slimy town council leader, announces that, due to budget cuts, Alex's scholarship has been rescinded. After being refused pay rises and loans, they hit on an implausible plan after a trip to Vegas: they're going to open an underground casino in the house of their recently separated gambling-addict friend, Frank (Mantzoukas).

The fact that you can probably guess most of the coming comic beats — the home casino expanding to include lavish pool bars and illegal fist fights, Scott and Kate taking to their thrilling new lives as shady gambling impresarios, an investigation into the strange goings-on by Kroll's evil principal stand-in — doesn't really make them any less enjoyable. Obviously, the cast (generously sprinkled with plenty of, "Oh it's them!" comedy actors from *Veep*, *Transparent* and beyond) is a big part of this. Poehler and Ferrell may rarely leave third gear but they're a good match, delivering the expected off-the-cuff weirdness as well as clownish physical moments (a hungover shopping trip with their daughter is particularly effective).

That said, it's Jason Mantzoukas (recognisable veteran of *The League* and countless other sitcom bit-parts) who, as kinetic, fast-talking Frank, is *The House*'s not-so-secret-weapon. When the casino owners tangle with local criminals (including Jeremy Renner in a brief, bloody cameo) and ineptly torture a card-counter, it's Frank's queasy retching and failure to play the tough guy that truly sells it.

As is often the way with comedies built on profane improvisational non sequiturs, not all of it works. The first act has more than a few clunkers (would anyone really confuse a 401(k) pension plan with a \$401,000 bank balance?) and there's a decidedly strange, late-stage *Terminator* spoof that seems to belong in an entirely different film. But mostly the highs outweigh the lows. And, in gambling terms, there's something to be said for a comedic safe bet. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT *Old School* with added poker chips? Perhaps. But this Ferrell and Poehler-powered comedy blockbuster has big laughs, an enjoyably grisly streak, and a film-stealing turn from Jason Mantzoukas.



ROUGH NIGHT



OUT NOW / RATED MA15+ / 101 MINS

DIRECTOR Lucia Aniello



CAST Scarlett Johansson, Kate McKinnon, Jillian Bell, Zoë Kravitz, Ilana Glazer



SCARLETT JOHANSSON HAS appeared in some great movies. The rest of the cast, especially Kate McKinnon and Jillian Bell, are reliable comedy veterans, while the team of writer/director Lucia Aniello and co-writer/actor Paul W. Downs work on the often-inspired Stateside sitcom *Broad City*. So how they've all gelled into a messy, mismatched and only fitfully funny crossbreed of *Bridesmaids* and *Very Bad Things* is even more of a mystery than you might think. There's initially a scruffy comedy appeal, but as the tone attempts to switch with the accidental-death plot taking over, the formula's seams start to show and even the cast's best efforts can't quite salvage this seemingly 'Rough Draft Night'. **JW**



THE BEGUILLED



OUT 23 OCTOBER / RATED M

DIRECTOR Sophia Coppola



CAST Nicole Kidman, Colin Farrell, Kirsten Dunst, Elle Fanning



SOFIA COPPOLA'S REMAKE of Don Siegel's 1971 Clint Eastwood vehicle *The Beguiled* — about an isolated, repressed community of women and girls who react to the presence of an attractive, charismatic man in their own revealing way during the American Civil War circa 1864 — presents a haunting, immersive mood-world far removed from the harsh digital reality of her previous film, *The Bling Ring*, proving she can turn her hand to whatever captures her imagination. And while it may not prove to be Coppola's best or most lasting film (just as it wasn't for both Siegel and Eastwood), it does reveal her as a constantly evolving, experimenting talent. And a filmmaker to cherish. **DW**



UNCHARTED: THE LOST LEGACY



OUT NOW
FORMATS PS4

DIRECTORS Shaun Escayg, Kurt Margenau
CAST Claudia Black, Laura Bailey, Usman Ally

PLOT Set after the events of 2016's *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*, *The Lost Legacy* shifts the series' focus to characters that previously had supporting roles. We follow Chloe Frazer (Black) and Nadine Ross (Bailey) as they search for a priceless treasure from India's Hindu past, encountering challenges of brain and brawn along the way.

UNCHARTED DIDN'T NEED *The Lost Legacy*, but at the same time, this *Uncharted* 4 epilogue-cum-new adventure is a mostly welcome addition to the Sony series' overarching story — one that's so far been stretched across four main games. And it's really the story that's going to make you fight, climb, swim and drive your way through *The Lost Legacy*, as there's very little innovation on display here in terms of how you actually play the game.

While this adventure casts you as Chloe Frazer (Black) rather than series staple Nathan Drake — her last appearance came in 2011's *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* — she slips and slides, rolls and leaps much like the wise-cracking, shirt-half-tucked hero of old. In hand-to-hand combat she's evidently schooled in martial arts, whereas Drake would simply slug it out; but truly, the moment-to-moment stuff here is almost every second alike to what preceded it.

This, and the repetition of mechanics, is acceptable, given *The Lost Legacy*'s roots — it was intended as downloadable content for *Uncharted 4*, before Naughty Dog realised it could go bigger and created a standalone experience. And with an eight-to-nine-hour duration — *Uncharted 4* ran over 15 hours —

you're unlikely to feel fatigued by doing the same stuff, several times.

Frazer is joined on her quest into rural India, in pursuit of a precious relic, by Nadine Ross (Bailey), a not-quite-reformed mercenary who served as an antagonist in *Uncharted 4*. The two become convincingly closer over the course of the game, occasionally commenting on what they're seeing in a very nudge-wink fashion. "Everything always comes in threes," is one such remark — and yes, don't they just, from antique puzzles to rockets needed to take down an attack chopper.

Cut scenes carry the plot onwards, interactive elements typically comprising either combat against insurgent forces, traversal of often-vertical environments (always look for the white ledges, of course), and elementary brain-teasers that have to be cracked to unlock both progression-essential pathways and trophy-ticking extras. One of the game's nine chapters is set in a modest open-world area, offering a few hours' worth of 4x4 exploration.

As is standard with Naughty Dog productions, the voice acting is top-notch, and everything moves swiftly enough to keep the player engaged, even when wearing their triangle button out with persistent quick-time events. Yet, some things don't quite click.

The main villain, the bespectacled Asav (Ally), rarely feels genuinely threatening due to a shortage of screen time. And when *The Lost Legacy* properly refers back to Nathan Drake and his brother Sam, it feels like cheap fan service. It would have been sweet to see these girls get on with it, largely forgetting the men who were negative influences on their past lives.

But then, the weight of precedent was always going to be baggage here — and perhaps the real story of Frazer, a likeably sarcastic and eminently resourceful character, is yet to come in a Drakes-free *Uncharted* of the future. **MIKE DIVERTE**

VERDICT *The Lost Legacy* wears its series history on its sleeve, for better and worse. Its repetition could impact on what's an enjoyable story, albeit one that's never as blockbuster-proportioned as Drake's adventures.



BATMAN: THE ENEMY WITHIN — EPISODE 1



OUT NOW / ANDROID, iOS, PC, PS4, XBOX ONE

DIRECTOR Kent Mudle

CAST Troy Baker, Enn Reitel, Murphy Guyer, Anthony Ingruber, Robin Atkin Downes

THE FIRST SEASON of Telltale's choose-your-own-adventure *Batman* game must have sold well as the second season has arrived quicker than any sequel in the company's history. The story picks up a few months later — The Riddler has returned to Gotham, and shady government bureau The Agency is muscling in on the GCPD's turf. The Riddler is ideal for the puzzle aspects of the game, and the strengths of the first season remain, notably being able to tackle certain problems as either Batman or Bruce Wayne. But the same old Telltale problems surface — the too-easy action portions and the nagging feeling that, good as the story is, you aren't influencing it half as much as the makers would like you to believe. **JP**



AGENTS OF MAYHEM



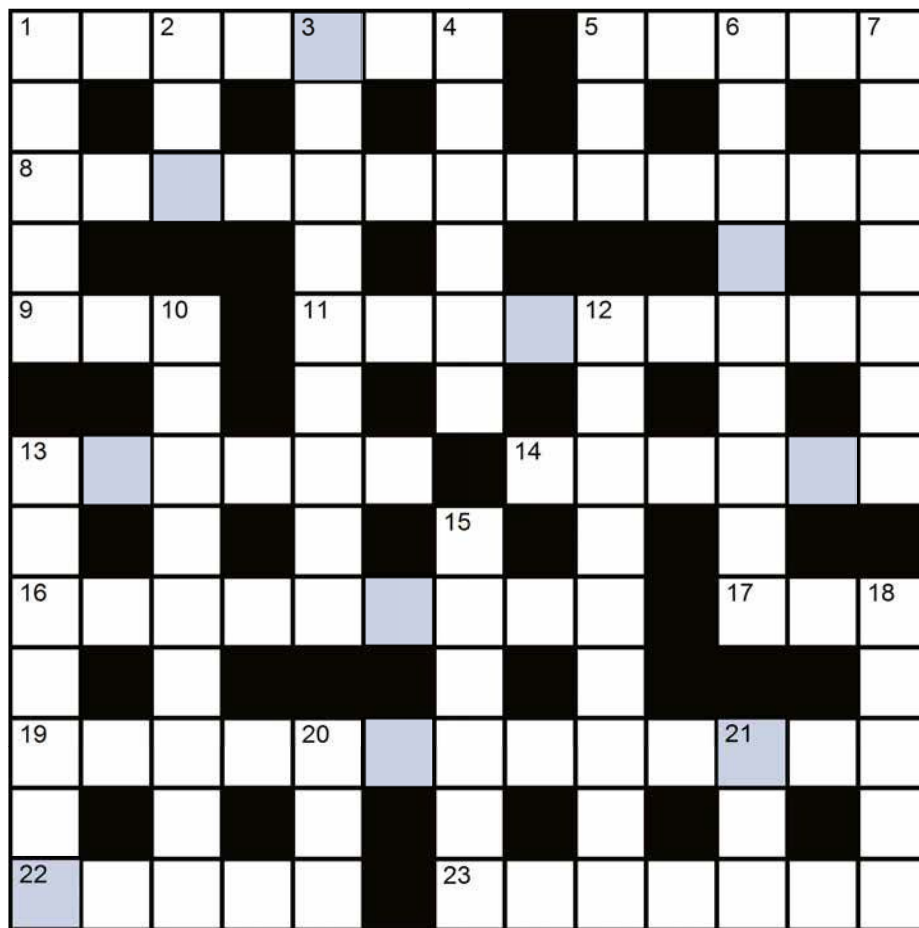
OUT NOW / PS4, XBOX ONE

DESIGNERS Anoop Shekar, Ryan McCabe

CAST Cherise Boothe, Mark Allan Stewart, Melanie Minichino, Salli Saffioti

A *SAINTS ROW* spin-off, which should give fans of the series some indication of what to expect — wall-to-wall third-person shooting action (with the odd bit of driving, exploring and platforming thrown into the mix), spectacular boss-battles, humour of the toilet-oriented variety, preposterously powerful guns and lots of explosions. But here the gameplay has been reimagined as a squad shooter although, bizarrely, it remains single player only. Still, the game's core — shooting the hell out of stuff to make it spectacularly blow up — is satisfying to the point of catharsis. And while it's never particularly smart, there's the definite sense it's the sort of game that will develop a cult following in the years to come. **SB**

CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 This Ian was Winston in *John Wick* (7)
- 5 Luke, Rupert or Linda maybe? (5)
- 8 The – (Sean Connery's monastery mystery) (4,2,3,4)
- 9 In which Rooney Mara was controversially cast as Tiger Lily (3)
- 11 Hugh Jackman starred in this Netflix movie about anorexia (2,3,4)
- 13 Natalie Portman's First Lady portrayal (6)
- 14 Jennifer Aniston lent her skills to this animated big bird comedy (6)
- 16 Werner Herzog resurrected this iconic vampire in 1979 (9)
- 17 Film company once famous for its musicals (3)
- 19 Dismantled Algerian harem provides a film for Danny Glover and Forest Whitaker (1,4,2,6)
- 22 Jennifer –, Lorraine Bracco's character in *The Sopranos* (5)
- 23 Was this a peak in the careers of Josh Brolin and Jason Clarke? (7)

DOWN

- 1 Simon Pegg and Lake Bell's date movie (3,2)
- 2 Could be Neill, could be Worthington (3)
- 3 Richard Curtis claimed this could be his directoral swansong (5,4)
- 4 *The Fifth* – (Cumberbatch starrer) (6)
- 5 Jennifer Lopez played this title character while Viola Davis was Lila (3)
- 6 – *For The King* (Tom Hanks movie) (1,8)
- 7 Stella seen in *The Poseidon Adventure* etc (7)
- 10 He portrayed Tom Wilkinson and Sissy Spacek's son in *In The Bedroom* (4,5)
- 12 This HBO TV series became a film starring Adrian Grenier and friends in 2015 (9)
- 13 *Mad Men*'s Don Draper (3,4)
- 15 Patrick who was Sir Godfrey Tibbett in *A View To A Kill* (6)
- 18 David located amid a *Dogma*-*Metropolis* double bill. (5)
- 20 *The Book Of* – (Denzel Washington) (3)
- 21 The good untruth with Reese Witherspoon (3)

SEPTEMBER ANSWERS:

ACROSS: 1 Odds, 3 Hannibal, 9/15 The Last Knight, 10 Grand, 11 Romeo Must Die, 13 Ang Lee, 17 Teresa Palmer, 20 Croft, 21 Gattaca, 22 Talented, 23 Paws. **DOWN:** 1 Outbreak, 2 Dream, 4 Arthur, 5 Night On Earth, 6 Blazing, 7 Ladd, 8 Taron Egerton, 12 Star Wars, 14 Grey Owl, 16 Maggie, 18 Moana, 19 Ice-T **ANAGRAM BRUCE BANNER**



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JUST IN time for Halloween is Season 6 of *American Horror Story*, which keeps the scares and surprises coming thick and fast. Enter now to win one of 10 Blu-rays.



TO ENTER, TELL US WHAT SEASON OF AMERICAN HORROR STORY IS YOUR FAVOURITE, AND WHY.

WIN! TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT ON BLU-RAY OR DVD

OPTIMUS PRIME goes rogue and Sir Anthony Hopkins enters the fray in this fifth entry into the biffing robots series. Enter to win one of five DVDs or one of five Blu-rays, specifying your preferred format.



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WIN! SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING ON BLU-RAY OR DVD

EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man swings into the Marvel universe in this winning reboot of the Spider-films. Enter to win one of five DVDs or one of five Blu-rays, specifying your preferred format.



TO ENTER, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE MARVEL FILM IS, AND WHY.

WIN! IN DUBIOUS BATTLE ON DVD

DIRECTED AND produced by James Franco and based on John Steinbeck's novel of the same name, this features a cracking cast (Franco, Nat Wolff, Josh Hutcherson, Selena Gomez, Vincent D'Onofrio, Bryan Cranston, Ed Harris and Robert Duvall) in a story about the labour movement for fruit workers in California during the 1930s. Enter to win one of 10 DVDs!

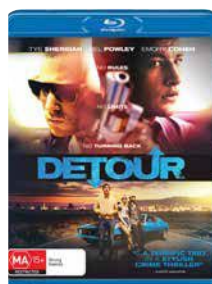
TO ENTER, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE JAMES FRANCO MOVIE IS, AND WHY.



WIN! DETOUR ON BLU-RAY

THIS BRITISH thriller starring Tye Sheridan is about a young law student who enters into a pact with a man who offers to kill his stepfather, whom he feels is responsible for the accident that sent his mother into a coma. Enter to win one of five Blu-rays and prepare to be thrilled!

TO ENTER, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE THRILLER FILM IS, AND WHY.



WIN! BABY DRIVER ON BLU-RAY OR DVD, PLUS THE SOUNDTRACK!

EDGAR WRIGHT'S comedy-action features killer tunes and killer car stunts (in that order), with Ansel Elgort as ace getaway driver Baby. Enter to win one of five DVDs or one of five Blu-rays, plus a soundtrack, specifying your preferred format.

TO ENTER, TELL US WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE EDGAR WRIGHT FILM IS, AND WHY.



COMPETITION ENDS 12 NOVEMBER

FOR A CHANCE to win these prizes, email us at empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au, write the prize in the subject line, your preferred format if there are both DVD or Blu-ray options and complete the answer in 25 words or less, not forgetting to include your contact details. All competitions are open to both Australian and New Zealander *Empire* readers. For conditions of entry visit www.bauer-media.com.au/terms/competition-terms

CAPTION COMP



WIN!

Write a brilliantly witty caption to the image above from new Aardman Animations stop-motion animated comedy *Early Man* from director Nick Park and score big! To enter, email empiregiveaways@bauer-media.com.au

EARLY MAN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 29 MARCH, 2018

FIVE WINNERS WILL SCORE A CHICKEN PEOPLE PRIZE PACK CONTAINING A DVD AND MOUSE MAT. THE FUNNY DOGO IS ABOUT THREE CONTENDERS AT A TOP US POULTRY SHOW.



AUGUST WINNER

"Flattering, but no, I didn't 'American Pie' this dessert."



Dave Bowman! You and four others have won an awesome *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* prize pack!

THE EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

THE SHINING CHOSEN BY ADAM WINGARD



Adam Wingard: "My favourite movie scene of all time is the bartender scene in *The Shining* with Jack Nicholson and Joe Turkel. I love the performances and the iconic-ness of the whole thing. If it comes on TV, I have to stop what I'm doing and watch it. I love the interactions between those two, but that scene in particular is about as good as movies get."

INT. OVERLOOK HOTEL

Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) is in a foul mood. He enters the deserted Gold Room, turns on the lights, goes up to the empty bar. Not a drink in sight.

JACK: God, I'd give anything for a drink. I'd give my goddamn soul for just a glass of beer.

He puts his heads in his hands. When he opens them again, what he sees makes him smile.

JACK: Hi, Lloyd. Little slow tonight, ain't it?

Jack laughs manically. We see why: a barman – Lloyd (Joe Turkel) – has suddenly appeared. What's more, the bar is now fully stocked.

LLOYD: Yes it is, Mr Torrance. [He steps forward and puts his hands on the counter] What'll it be?

JACK: I'm awfully glad you asked me that, Lloyd. Because I just happen to have two twenties and two tens right here in my wallet. I was afraid they were going to be there until next April. So here's what. You slip me a bottle of bourbon, a little glass, and some ice. You can do that, can't you, Lloyd? You're not too busy, are you?

LLOYD: No, sir. Not busy at all.

Lloyd turns to start making the drink.

JACK: Good man. You set 'em up and I'll knock 'em back, Lloyd, one by one. White man's burden, Lloyd my man, white man's burden.

He takes out his wallet. It's empty.

JACK: Say, Lloyd, it seems I'm temporarily light. How's my credit in this joint anyway?

LLOYD: Your credit's fine, Mr Torrance.

JACK: That's swell. I like ya, Lloyd. I always liked ya. You were always the best of 'em. Best goddamn bartender from Timbuktu to Portland,

Maine. Or Portland, Oregon, for that matter.

LLOYD: Thank you for saying so.

JACK: Here's to five miserable months on the wagon, and all the irreparable harm that it's caused me.

He takes a drink. One gulp. Gone.

LLOYD: How are things going, Mr Torrance?

JACK: Things could be better, Lloyd. Things could be a whole lot better.

LLOYD: I hope it's nothing serious.

JACK: Nah. Nothing serious.

Lloyd pours him another drink.

JACK: Just a little problem with the old sperm bank upstairs. Nothing I can't handle, Lloyd. Thanks.

LLOYD: Women. Can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em.

JACK: Words of wisdom, Lloyd... Words. Of. Wisdom.

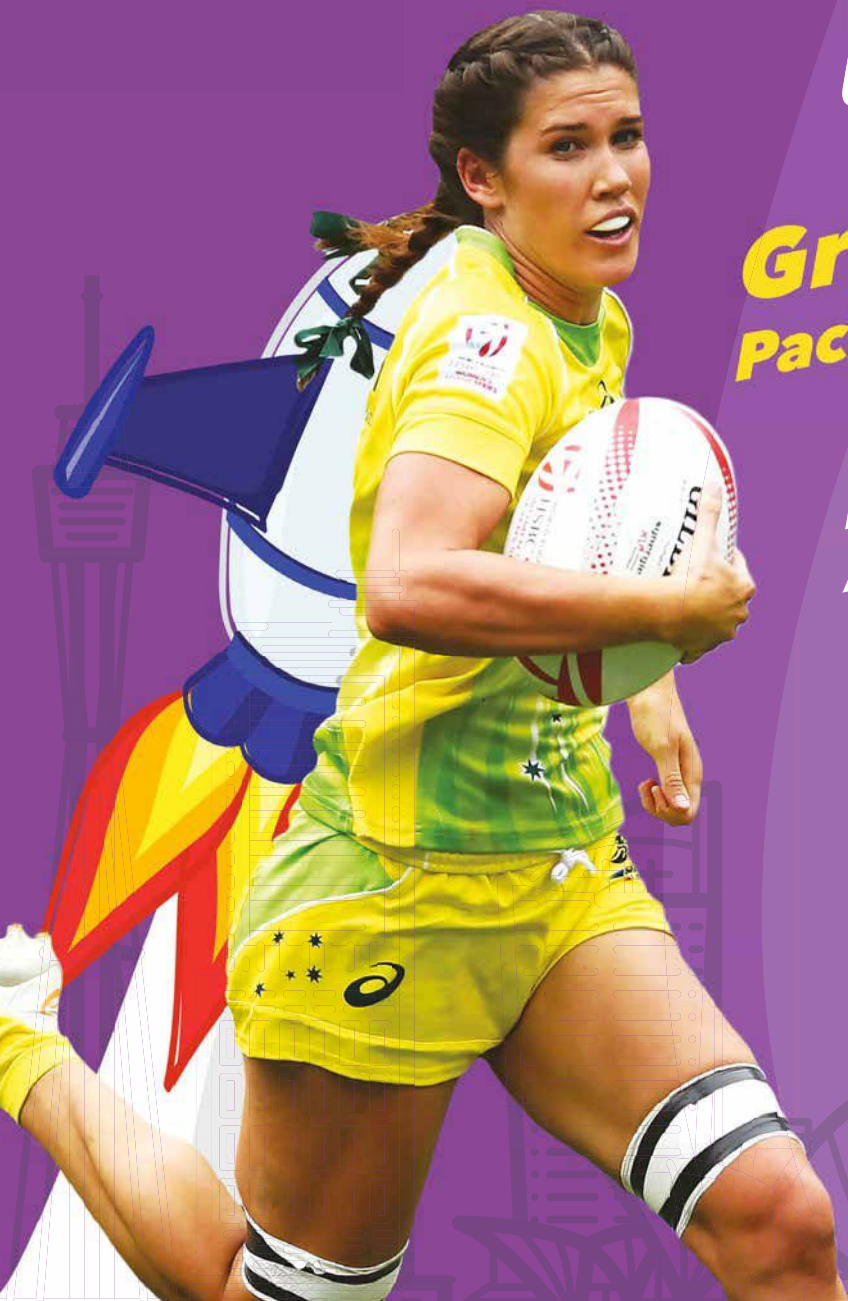


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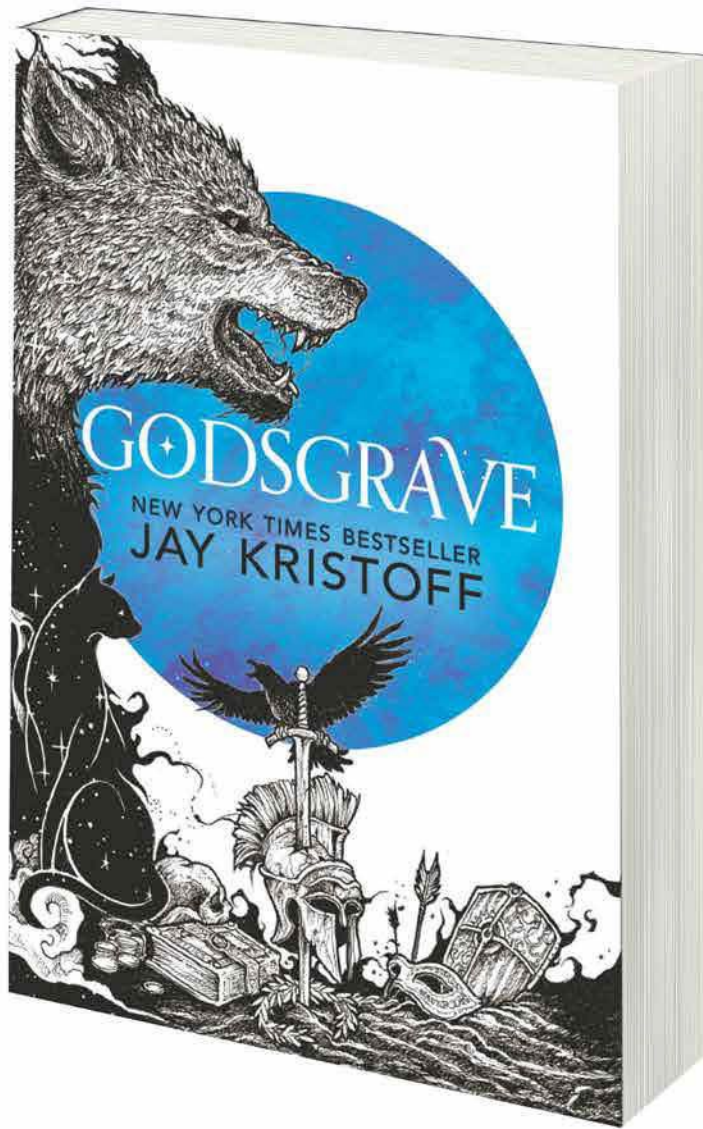
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